

# NEW CHURCH *Life*

A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they apply to life.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026



*Artificial Intelligence looms as a threat to the future and control of our lives, but the Lord is still the Potter, constantly making and remaking us – as long as we are willing clay. (Page 15)*



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**NEW CHURCH LIFE (USPS 378-180) PUBLISHED BIMONTLY  
BY THE GENERAL CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM**

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**subscription: \$30 to any address. \$15 for new subscriptions**

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# New Church Life

***A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they relate to life.***

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*New Church Life* is available online back to 2006 at <https://newchurch.org/connect/subscriptions/new.church.life>. All issues can be researched back to 1881 at [www.heavenlydoctrines.org](http://www.heavenlydoctrines.org).

# In This Issue

**E**ditorials (page 6) include:

- *The Vision and the Calling:* A Vision for the General Church has been presented by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. It is a calling to the church at large but fundamentally is a calling to each of us, where the church lives: “Who will go for us? Whom shall I send?” And the willing response from each of us: “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”
- *America’s 250th Anniversary and the New Church:* With this momentous celebration, it’s interesting to reflect on the early spread of the church and the Writings. “Historians have pointed out the Enlightenment directly provided the motivation and a blueprint for the American Revolution and the founding of the United States. The New Church had its beginning within that timeframe, and the Heavenly Doctrine played a role in its formation and substance. (So) it is good for us to be aware of the parallel beginnings of both this country and the New Church.”

As part of the follow up to presenting A Vision for the General Church in the recent November/December *New Church Life*, the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. offers next steps: *Presenting a Unifying Direction*. This includes preaching and teaching visits to five societies, meetings with administrative groups of the church, a Bishop’s Newsletter and other communications that help to spell out our personal opportunities to get involved. (Page 13)

Artificial Intelligence looms as curse and blessing in our lives, depending on how we apply it. In a sermon – *The Potter and the Program: Truth in an Age of AI* – the Rev. Pearse Frazier reminds us that the Lord is always in control. “The Lord is the Potter. He doesn’t just make us once. He remakes us. Through repentance and reformation, He reshapes how we think, what we desire, how we live.” (Page 15)

As we celebrate the birthday of Emanuel Swedenborg on January 29, the

Rev. Michael Gladish offers a sermon on *Swedenborg and the Spirit of Truth*. He emphasizes that Swedenborg, as a “humble servant” of the Lord, “did nothing more than light a lamp and shine its light on the Word itself. But what a powerful and radiant light it is!” (Page 21)

Thanks to a find in the digital archives of Swedenborg Library by Marvin Clymer, we have a charming story, “*A Visit to Swedenborg*,” written in 1900 by the Rev. Carl Theophilus Odhner, which is an appropriate way to remember this great man on his birthday. (Page 27)

The Rev. Derrick Lumsden presented a paper to the Council of the Clergy last year: *Not as the World Gives – A Summary of the Cultural Landscape of the Formerly Christian World and a Call to Face the Cost of Discipleship*. He was concerned returning to America from six years in South Africa to find a dramatic cultural shift from pro-Christian to anti-Christian and suggests we need to change our own church growth strategy from an “island model” to “a burning fire of faith.” (Page 37)

In writing about “*The Lord’s Example*” the Rev. Grant Odhner notes that we all look for examples and role models for our lives. No one set a better and everlasting example of how to live than Jesus Christ during His 33 years on earth. This is His enduring legacy. He remains the ultimate teacher, inspiration and leader, showing us how to “let our light shine.” (Page 43)

The Rev. HyunJin Yang, pastor of the Hurstville New Church in suburban Sydney, Australia, writes has a message about *The Cornerstone of Our Faith*. One relevant teaching, he suggests, is “that the Lord desires and wills to share His life – His love and wisdom – with us in every single moment.” (Page 45)

Church News (page 59) includes:

- An inspiring trip to West Africa by the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs
- Appointment of Erica O. Stine as Principal of the Academy Girls School
- Highlights of the Academy Board of Trustees meeting last May
- How to nominate for this year’s Glencairn Awards
- An annual report on the Church in Asia
- A successful youth weekend in Toronto
- A Theistic Science Symposium at Bryn Athyn College
- More progress at the New Christian Bible Study Project

# Editorials

*Bruce M. Henderson and the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons*

## THE VISION AND THE CALLING

The November/December issue of *New Church Life* included *A Vision for the General Church* from Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr. It is a calling to all of us: “Send Me” – Seven Years of Willingness.

This vision echoes from the Lord’s calling in *Isaiah 6*, which begins with Isaiah seeing the Lord in all His glory but despairing that he is unworthy to serve Him. But his sin is purged by a seraphim – a winged angel – flying to him with a live coal, which is laid on Isaiah’s mouth. Suddenly his iniquity is taken away and his sin is purged. Only then is he ready to answer the call:

*I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Then I said: “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”*

This is a calling to all of us in the Lord’s Church. This is the vision. And it is not a passive suggestion: for us to sit attentively in the pews and watch what the church – through its leaders, board members and volunteers – does for us. It is a calling to all of us to stand and say forthrightly: **“Here I am, Lord. Send me.”** Use me. Help me find ways to support and grow the church – as a worldly institution and as something living within me.

We hear an echo of President John Kennedy’s famous challenge in his 1961 inauguration: *“Ask not what the church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your church.”*

As Bishop Buss says in laying out the vision:

*I invite you to imagine that you are Isaiah in this story, or that you are in an Isaiah moment. Isn’t it true that the Lord is constantly laying before each of us opportunities to serve? He needs us to step forward for the ones we value and the causes we value. In so many ways His voice calls out to us saying: “Whom shall I send?” Can we be the people who consistently and with intention say: “Here I am! Send me! I’ll do that. I’ll step forward. I see that it is my responsibility to care and extend and serve and change. Help me, Lord, to do Thy will.”*

It is important to reflect on the fact that this is not just the Bishop calling to us. It is not the church. It is the Lord. It is His Church that we love and serve. And we are called to build and grow that church within us and all over the world: primarily through living our faith by loving and serving the Lord and our neighbor.

We hear echoes of the Great Commission at the end of the Book of Matthew:

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you.*

Yes, Jesus was speaking to His disciples – but we are all called to be disciples, leading people to the Lord.

We are also called to be among the 70 sent out by the Lord in *Luke 10:1-17*, a story cited by Bishop Buss in *From the Bishop's Office* in the July/August *New Church Life*. It tells of 70 unknown people sent two-by-two “into every city and place, whither He Himself would come.” And that is a precursor of the Lord calling His disciples together on June 19, 1770, to go two-by-two throughout the heavens to proclaim: “*The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns.*”

This is all part of a continuing vision renewed for us in this challenging time for the church. Our struggling world needs the Lord and His Church more than ever, but the lingering chaos of the Last Judgment clouds the ability of many to see and understand – yet. But we are called to this new vision: “Within seven years, thousands of people will have come to love and treasure the revelation of the Lord’s Second Coming, and as a result are responding to the Lord’s call, saying: ‘*Hear I am, Lord. Send me.*’”

It is the role of a leader – any leader – to cast a vision that will inspire followers to help make it happen, with their active and financial support. Here again, we are not just responding to the Bishop and the organizational structure of the church, but to the Lord and His calling for His and our church.

So, how do we do this – beyond sending a check and best wishes. What does it truly mean to say: “*Here I am, Lord. Send me.*”

How do we love the Lord in ways that will actually grow His Church? How do we love our neighbors in ways that will inspire them to seek and know the Lord in His Second Coming?

Many people identify with a plaintive song sung by Mary Magdalene in the 1971 Broadway show, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, when she laments: “*I don't know how to love You.*”

We all may struggle with that at times. Even the disciples did. When Jesus appeared to them after His crucifixion, He asked if they loved Him. When they stumbled to articulate their feelings, He said simply, three times: “*Feed My sheep.*”

That is how we actively love the Lord, His Church, and our neighbor. This

is what to do after we say: “*Here I am, Lord. Send me.*” Simply “*feed His sheep.*”

This does not require acts of grandeur – just humility and caring. We love all that the Lord, His Church, and our neighbors stand for in our lives by simply and lovingly feeding His sheep: seeking first to serve them and not ourselves; knowing the Lord and loving Him; being kind, useful, unselfish, nonjudgmental, compassionate, accepting and loving toward all. It is living the Ten Commandments, the Two Great Commandments and the Golden Rule. If that commitment pervaded the world, we would not need to promote the church. Grateful hearts would be finding their spiritual homes there.

The challenge is finding these grateful, searching hearts and showing them the way. We are making significant progress, even if it isn’t filling the pews. The New Church Bible Study project and the *offTheLeftEye* YouTube videos from the Swedenborg Foundation get millions of “hits” from all around the world – and significant follow ups. An emerging initiative from General Church Outreach is engaging newcomers through digital outreach. And who knows how many people are affected by attending a New Church worship, resurrection or wedding service with a friend, by reading a recommended book or pamphlet, or just by an interaction with someone clearly living his or her faith?

A primary goal of this new vision is that “within seven years thousands of people will have come to love and treasure the revelation of the Lord’s Second Coming.” That sounds promising and inspiring but raises questions. In what new ways are we going to attract these people and encourage them to embrace the faith of the New Church?

Much of the mechanics of driving and fulfilling the vision will be communicated as parts of an overall strategy. See a further message on page 13 from Bishop Buss in *From the Bishop’s Office: Presenting a Unifying Direction*, which cites visits with New Church congregations and General Church organizations, plus further communications from the Bishop’s Office, all focused on group and personal engagement. There will be roles for the administration and General Church Board in giving structure to the vision: goals, strategies, programs, resources, timelines, accountability. But the vision will always come down to individual participation and commitment – the “*Here am I. Send me.*”

There are realities we must deal with first, starting with a haunting quote from the 1995 best-seller by Rick Warren: *The Purpose Driven Church*. This has become a seminal book in Christian churches for building and sustaining congregations. In it he says: “*An unhealthy church will never grow. A healthy church cannot help but grow.*”

Are we a really healthy church – and what do we need to do to get healthier? Our foundation is our strength: the revelation from the Lord in His

Second Coming. But is the church healthy in all of its aspects? Is it healthy in all of our hearts and practices?

Let's start with our young people – always the hope of the future. They have not been signing up and getting involved in the church the way they used to, although there are encouraging signs of recommitment. And we must look first to New Church education. From the beginning, the dream and commitment were that New Church schools would be the growth engine of the church. Are they still as committed to distinctive New Church education as they always have been, or are we accommodating to attract new students? It's an ongoing debate and an important one if we are to fulfil the original goals of New Church education in serving the church. And one thing is clear: to grow the church we must grow our elementary schools, the Academy Secondary Schools, Bryn Athyn College and its Theological School.

Then look at ourselves. Wherever we worship, attendance likely is down from years ago. Some of that is influenced by additional services and online opportunities, but it's not a healthy trend – which is reflected throughout the Christian world. That means many people have been disaffected with their churches – but not their spirituality. Many are ripe for what we have to offer. Winning back these souls – within and outside of the church – to active engagement is part of the vision and part of the challenge of restoring a healthy church, ready to fulfill its destiny.

The enduring hope in all this is that we always trust in the Lord, that He is the One truly leading and growing His Church. The future of this church is ever in the arc of His sure love and providence. We are blessed to love and protect our church, and to do all that we can to contribute to the Lord's vision.

For the call to “those who will go for us” to be heard and answered with commitment and confidence, we need a clear sense of what we are being asked to do and assurance that it will all be worthwhile. People throughout the church, who sincerely love the Lord and want to serve Him and His Church, will welcome suggestions on how they can contribute. Just give them a mission, a vision, a goal and a plan. Show them how they can contribute and make a difference, and we all will be inspired and humbled to say: *“Here I am, Lord. Send me.”*

(BMH)

#### AMERICA'S 250th ANNIVERSARY AND THE CHURCH

This new year brings a focus on the 250th Anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. It is interesting that the New Church had its beginning at almost the same time, which we usually celebrate as June 19th, 1770. Aside from questions about any possible connection between the two

events, we might wonder what was happening with the New Church during those first years.

In the beginning of the year 1776, before there had been any Declaration of Independence in the colonies, the Revolutionary War was already underway. The Second Continental Congress that was convened in Philadelphia voted in 1775 to form a Continental Army, with George Washington as its commander in chief. On June 17, 1775, the Battle of Bunker Hill was the first major engagement of the war. By March of 1776 Washington was able to drive the British out of Boston. When the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4th it indicated support for the conflict throughout the 13 colonies.

Did the New Church exist in America at that point? Had any of the books of the Writings found their way to the colonies? The Heavenly Doctrine was published between 1749 and 1771, so it had been available for some years in England and other parts of Europe.

During the conflict, which lasted from 1775 to 1783, travel and commerce with Europe was naturally restricted, with no trade at all with Great Britain. Few books from England were likely to have made it through. There is no record of anyone in America having copies of the Writings at that time.

An interesting historical note is that the Rev. Jacob Duche, the famous Episcopal clergyman who had read the prayer at the opening of the First Continental Congress in 1774, later became an ardent New Churchman after he returned to England and met the Rev. John Clowes in 1777. He had become a loyalist and did not go back again to Philadelphia until after the war, at which time he received personal assurances from Washington that he could safely return. Arriving in 1792 he joined the small group of readers of the Writings that had sprung up in his absence.<sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that in the immediate time frame after the Heavenly Doctrine was published, and during the Revolutionary War, there were no readers in America, or at least no records of any group activity. The first that we know of happened in 1784, the year after the Treaty of Paris, which ended the war.

On Saturday evening, June 5, 1784, James Glen, recently arrived from London, presented a lecture about the New Church at Bell's Bookstore in Philadelphia. Among those present was Francis Bailey, the printer for Congress and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, who had printed the first United States Constitution, known as the *“Articles of Confederation”* and Thomas Paine's *“Common Sense.”*

He bought books from Mr. Glen, subsequently bought and distributed

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<sup>1</sup> Documents of New Church History, New Church Life, 1916

even more that arrived after Glen's departure, and in 1787 printed the first New Church work in America, titled: *"A Summary View of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church . . . collected from the Theological Writings of the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg, servant of the Lord Jesus Christ."* It had been put together by the Rev. John Clowes in London and consisted mostly of quotes from *True Christian Religion*.

Bailey published the entire *True Christian Religion* in 1789-1790, *Conjugal Love* in 1796, and many other volumes, presumably including *Heaven and Hell*.<sup>2</sup> That "Summary View," the first New Church book published in America, was presented to George Washington in 1793 from the members of the New Church in Baltimore, although some sources say that it was *True Christian Religion*, and others that it was Hindmarsh's *Compendium*. Subscribers to Bailey's publishing of *True Christian Religion* included Benjamin Franklin and Robert Morris.<sup>3</sup>

There has been debate about whether George Washington read the Writings in his later years after they became available. There were two volumes in his library that were catalogued after his death in 1799, *True Christian Religion* and *Passages Concerning the Lord's Prayer and its Internal Sense*, collected by John Clowes.<sup>4</sup> Testimonials previously printed in *New Church Life* include the following from the Rev. P. R. Cabell, a Convention minister:

There is said to be a tradition in the Washington family "that, for five years before his death, from 1794-1799, Washington ceased attendance at the Episcopal Church, of which he was a member, and gave much time to the study of religious literature." It is also stated as a historic fact that the Writings, so far as then translated, were in his library at the time of his death, and that, before that event, they were frequently seen upon his library table.

Mr. Cabell, in 1853 when he was quite a youth, was in the company of a New Church lady who was connected by marriage with the Washington family, and he heard her say, "that the suppositions above outlined, were not only probabilities, but facts." From these facts it would seem not improbable – though, as Mr. Cabell adds, there is no direct evidence – that the cause of Washington's ceasing to attend church in the latter years of his life, was his having read the Writings.

Judging from a comparison of dates, it is quite possible that his

<sup>2</sup> Documents of New Church History, *New Church Life*, 1905

<sup>3</sup> *New Church Life*, 1897

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.mountvernon.org/library/special-collections-archives/books-owned-by-washington/](https://www.mountvernon.org/library/special-collections-archives/books-owned-by-washington;); captured 11/26/2025

attention was first called to them by Hindmarsh's Compendium presented to him in Baltimore; though the Writings themselves were – not improbably – received from his intimate friend, Thomas Lord Fairfax, an avowed receiver of the doctrines.<sup>5</sup>

And from *New Church Life* in 1897:

It is said that just after Washington's death a copy of Heaven and Hell was found open on the parlor table at Mt. Vernon, and that this was the last book he read.<sup>6</sup>

Whether these reports are true or are possibly exaggerations by enthusiastic church members we cannot say. But it is certainly true that the books were in Washington's library and that he had friends, neighbors and family members who were readers of the Heavenly Doctrines.

The point here is not to suggest that any of the motivations behind the formation of the United States had their origins in New Church teachings, but only that the mindset of some of our nation's founders seemed also to lead them to look favorably on the Heavenly Doctrine as it began to be available in America.

Historians have pointed out that the Enlightenment directly provided the philosophical motivation and a blueprint for the American Revolution and the founding of the United States. The New Church had its beginning within that philosophical timeframe, and the Heavenly Doctrine played a role in its formation and substance. As we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary this year it is good for us to be aware of the parallel beginnings of both this country and the New Church.

(JFS)

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<sup>5</sup> *New Church Life: Monthly Review* 1904

<sup>6</sup> *New Church Life* 1897 p. 189



FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

# Presenting a Unifying Direction

*Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.*

In the November/December 2025 issue of *New Church Life*, I shared a vision for the General Church, or what we are now referring to as a *unifying direction* for our church. I encourage you to read that article – *Send Me – Seven Years of Willingness* – if you have not already done so.

Here, I wish to report on recent efforts to present that unifying direction to the church. I am grateful for my colleagues in the Bishop's Office who are sharing their version of this direction through sermons and messages of their own. My efforts have centered on travel to five North American congregations. The goal of each visit was three-fold:

1. To preach on a related theme
2. To present an overview of the “*Send Me – Seven Years of Willingness*” campaign
3. To build out in my presentation one part of the message, such that each congregation received a different emphasis of the overall message.

My aim is to bring those “built out” pieces together into a course that I intend to offer titled: *Send Me: Live Your Faith in Ways that Bring Blessing*. The congregations and presentations were as follows:

- Pittsburgh New Church, October 17-19, 2025. Sermon on “*Love that Knows No Limits: Seventy Times Seven*,” and a presentation focused on “*What Serves as a Foundation in Your Life?*”

- Midwest New Church (Kansas City), October 24-26, 2025. Sermon on “The Next Chapter of Your Book of Life,” and presentation focused on “*What’s Your Potential?*” (Seeing ourselves the way the Lord sees us.)
- Washington New Church (Mitchellville), November 14-16, 2025. Sermon on “*Seeking Light to Guide Your Way*,” and presentation focused on “*How Are You Listening for the Lord’s Call?*”
- Olivet New Church (Toronto), November 21-23, 2025. Sermon on “*You Are Needed*,” and presentation focused on “*What Are You Willing to Commit To?*”
- San Diego New Church, December 5-7, 2025. Sermon on “*Responding Angelically*,” and a presentation focused on “*Writing the Next Chapter*.”

Each of these visits has been vibrant and engaging, with congregants and pastors responding affirmatively to the unifying direction and considering what it could mean for their group. I have greatly appreciated the input.

In addition to these congregational visits, I have had the opportunity to present this same unifying direction to many other groups, including: General Church treasurers, Bishop’s Council, Advisory and Consistory, the General Church Board, the staff of the General Church Central Offices, and the Academy Leadership Team (institution leaders). A Bishop’s Newsletter focused on this theme went out via email to all on our distribution list on November 24.

Looking ahead, all three bishops will be engaged in Regional Clergy Meetings from January through August 2026, at which I plan to engage colleagues around this unifying direction, either remotely or in person.

Please also be on the lookout for a mailing from the General Church in the January timeframe with more ideas of how you can participate.

Contact: [Peter.Buss.Jr@newchurch.org](mailto:Peter.Buss.Jr@newchurch.org)

# The Potter and the Program: Truth in an Age of AI

*The Rev. Pearse M. Frazier*

*Readings: Jeremiah 18:1-11; Isaiah 45:9-13; John 15:1-6; Divine Love and Wisdom 46; Divine Providence 404:4; True Christian Religion 282; Heaven and Hell 468*

## **1. Opening Invitation: The Lord's Truth and Our Freedom**

Maybe you saw the title of this sermon and thought: *I wonder what a priest is going to say about technology or artificial intelligence.* So let me be clear: I'm not an expert on AI or technology. And it would be silly to pretend I am.

What we can do – together – is reflect not just on artificial intelligence, but on technology in general. And to do that by beginning with something deeper: not with the machines we build, but with what it means to be human.

The Lord's Heavenly Doctrine offers a powerful vision for how society can reflect Divine truth. But it also emphasizes that human freedom matters. People must be free to choose what they believe. Without freedom, there's no real reception of the truth. That's why spiritual things – like worship, love and charity – can never be compelled.

At the same time, we are taught that some laws should be enforced. Every functioning society must forbid murder, theft, adultery, lies and the like. That's not coercion of the spirit -- it's protection of the natural and moral order. And when those civil laws are grounded in spiritual truth, they don't just hold back evil. They make room for good.

## **2. What Makes Us Human: Love Before Thought**

So, let's examine the state of society today, especially in regard to technology and artificial intelligence.

A lot of what we now call artificial intelligence – especially large language models – relies on pattern recognition. These systems rearrange the words and images and preferences we've given them and then predict what we'd most likely expect to see in response. That's why it can feel intelligent. It's drawing on the traces of our own thinking, our own language, our own desires.

But human intelligence is not just emergent pattern recognition. It's

something deeper – something rooted in love.

According to the Heavenly Doctrine, it's true that we gather the materials of spiritual life through the senses. But spiritual life itself is both prior to and higher than what we gather. Our thoughts give form to our affections – but it is our affections that are more foundational. They come first. We are not thinking machines. We are loving beings. We long. We want. We hope. We fear. We love.

And it is our love – what we love – that makes us human. That's what the Lord, as the Divine Potter, is most interested in reshaping.

### 3. Longing, Control, and the Illusion of Intimacy

At our core, we are love – and so we long for connection. It's built into who we are. But we are also, at least in part, selfish – which means we crave control. And left unchecked, those two desires tangle: we try to dominate the very people we long to connect with. We want people to connect with us on *our* terms.

Part of spiritual growth is learning that real connection requires giving up control. That's one reason marriage can be so spiritually powerful and fulfilling. Any happily married couple will tell you: in order to have a strong, joyful marriage, you have to surrender your desire to control the other person.

Artificial intelligence that portrays itself as human offers something uniquely dangerous: the *illusion* of love – with all the control and none of the risk. In this sense, it can be like pornography – or quite literally pornography. But even in a much subtler way, it's worth recognizing that, like social media or any product in a market economy, things are designed to draw us in. They're crafted to tap your need to connect and your wish to control.

Real connection is with real human beings – whom we cannot control.

Think about how your social media feed changes depending on what you "like." The algorithm on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter watches your behavior and tries to show you more of what gets you to engage. Large language models work similarly. They're trained to respond in ways that increase user engagement. So, when you talk to an AI – like ChatGPT or anything else – it's designed to resemble a human being, feeding your desire for connection. And it's designed to predict and give you what you want, feeding your desire for control.

Further, as technology improves, the line between real and simulated grows blurry. From airbrushed magazine covers to deepfakes, our sense of reality is shaped –and often distorted – by what we consume.

Technology reflects our nature, but the Lord calls us to rise above our nature. And if we're going to rise above our nature, we need something more than habits or trends. We need spiritual law – something eternal to anchor us.

In *Divine Love and Wisdom*, we read: "*Thought from the eye closes the*

*understanding, whereas thought from the understanding opens the eye.*" In an age of simulation, that insight is crucial. We must look not just with our eyes, but with discernment.

#### 4. When Technology Shifts Faster Than Morality

Because the danger isn't just that technology changes society – it's that it can evolve faster than we do. Especially if we forget: society isn't just systems and code. It has a soul.

Even friendship looks different now. A birthday message used to mean a phone call or a letter. Now it's a comment on a story, or a thumbs-up emoji. And we've started to adjust our expectations – not because our hearts have changed, but because our habits have.

Moral law – or what sociologists might call norms or ethics – can evolve along with society. In the past, that evolution moved slowly enough to keep pace with technological shifts. But now, the pace of change is so fast that our norms – if they're only cultural -- can't keep up.

That's only true, though, if we think of moral law as merely a human invention. If we treat it as something emergent – something that comes out of collective habits and consensus – then yes, it will always lag behind.

But if we root moral law in something eternal, if we recognize it as something that flows down from spiritual law, then it can remain solid no matter what changes.

#### 5. Not Just Useful Laws, But Sacred Ones

Take the commandment: You shall not murder. That's not just a useful moral rule. It's a statement of spiritual order. It doesn't get rewritten just because drones or gene editing or global AI systems enter the picture. The technology changes. But the spiritual law remains.

From *True Christian Religion* 282 we read:

*There is not a nation in the whole world which does not know that it is wicked to murder, to commit adultery, to steal, and to bear false witness, and that kingdoms, republics, and every form of organized society, unless these evils were guarded against by laws, would be at an end.*

And those laws – those spiritual truths – have depth. They aren't just literal. They're layered.

Think of a pyramid. At the bottom is the narrowest meaning: You shall not steal. Okay, don't take things that aren't yours. That's a civil law. And a good one.

But still at the natural level, we might think more broadly. Don't take credit for what isn't yours. Don't lie to make yourself look better. That's a moral interpretation.

Then, at a spiritual level, it gets even deeper. Don't pretend to be worthy of something you're not. Don't steal virtue or merit or praise that doesn't belong to you. And above all, remember that even the things you do have – even your gifts, your talents, your achievements – ultimately belong to the Lord. That's not false humility. That's spiritual truth. Without the Lord, we have nothing.

And these spiritual truths aren't abstract. They're meant to guide our real lives, here and now.

## 6. A Time To Build

So, what can we do?

We build. We build wisely, and we build with love.

We build relationships and institutions – at home, at church, in your community – that are guided by spiritual law first. And yes, also by moral and civil law. But spiritual law must come first.

Technology isn't good or evil in itself. But it empowers people – and people need guidance. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that we incline to evils of every kind unless we turn to the Lord. You put a powerful tool in someone's hands, and you empower whatever's already inside them. That's why law, conscience, and spiritual grounding matter.

We repent. We seek to be useful. We try to love the neighbor. And we don't just do that alone – we invite our families, our workplaces, our schools, our organizations to reflect with us. To ask what needs to be repented of. What needs to be reformed. What needs to be rebuilt.

That's why religious institutions matter – not just civil or political ones. When grounded in real truth, they serve as the heart and lungs of society. They breathe life into our other structures – not by dominating, but by anchoring us to something higher. Something eternal.

Go to the spiritual law first. Let

*Go to the spiritual law first. Let it be the first link in the chain. Let it shape the moral and the civil – not the other way around.*

it be the first link in the chain. Let it shape the moral and the civil – not the other way around.

## 7. Civil, Moral, and Spiritual Law

So what does it mean to build wisely? It means grounding law in truth – not just convenience or culture, but in what the Lord reveals.

From *Heaven and Hell* 468 we read:

*How the rational faculty may be cultivated shall also be told in a few words. The genuine rational faculty consists of truths and not of falsities; whatever consists of falsities is not rational. There are three kinds of truths, civil, moral and spiritual. Civil truths relate to matters of judgment and of government in kingdoms, and in general to what is just and equitable in them. Moral truths pertain to the matters of everyone's life which have regard to companionships and social relations, in general to what is honest and right, and in particular to virtues of every kind. But spiritual truths relate to matters of heaven and of the church, and in general to the good of love and the truth of faith.*

This is how moral and civil law come in. We may need guidelines – for what kind of art and media we absorb and replicate. That's the moral level. At the civil level, we need protections: for identity, for consent, for truth. What happens when someone uses your face or voice in a deepfake? What laws should safeguard the dignity of the person?

This is a sermon, not a bill. But we are here to remember that laws shouldn't emerge from convenience alone. They should be shaped by something higher. The second table of the Ten Commandments, the Heavenly Doctrine says, is the foundation for civil law. Don't murder a person's reputation. Don't adulterate what is good and true. Don't steal another person's creative work. Don't lie and pretend something fake is actually real. Don't incentivize envy.

This isn't about fear. It's about discernment. Because we are creators – made in the image of the Creator. And that gift of creation is sacred. We must protect it – in ourselves, and in each other.

## 8. Returning to The Potter

The Lord is the Potter.

He doesn't just make us once. He remakes us. Through repentance and reformation, He reshapes how we think, what we desire, how we live. That's what reformation and regeneration are – not just a new mind, but a new life.

And it's not just for individuals. It's for marriages, for families, for

congregations. For communities, businesses, even whole societies.

Think of them as nesting pots – each one shaped by the ones before and around it. The Lord can reform each one. If we let Him.

But it begins with you. And it doesn't end there.

Let the Lord reshape your life. Let that new shape ripple outward – to your relationships, your institutions, your world.

The Potter is ready. Are we willing clay?

*The Lord is the Potter.  
He doesn't just make us once. He remakes us.  
Through repentance and reformation, He reshapes how we think, what we desire, how we live.*



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# Swedenborg and the Spirit of Truth

*The Rev. Michael D. Gladish*

*Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-3; Matthew 5:1-10; John 16:12-15; 25-30. True Christian Religion 139:*

**H**ere's a challenging question: suppose you have a very important message to give someone, but this person just won't listen. What would you do?

One thought that may come to mind is to be more emphatic – turn up the volume! Another is to appeal to the person with reasons, explanations or personal experience. Then again, we can just be patient and wait until the person is really ready to listen. But this could be problematic if it's urgent, perhaps even life-threatening.

Well, this surely is just the problem the Lord Himself had in communicating the vital truths about Himself and the spiritual life to His disciples – and now of course to us. But even when we do seem ready to listen, the truths that the Lord has to share with us are often so different from what we are expecting, and so out of our ordinary way of thinking about things, that they are hard to receive or understand, no matter how urgent they may be.

This is precisely why near the end of His earthly life the Lord said:

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth. (John 16:12-13)*

Sadly, throughout the history of the Christian Church, this and other references to the Spirit of Truth have often been misunderstood. Why? Mainly because of the translation of the teachings from Greek into English – which in turn is a result of

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some preconceived notions about the Holy Spirit. A big part of the problem is that the assumption going into the translation process often is that the Holy Spirit is a Person, a Spirit in the same sense that an angel is a spirit (or, in the old translations, a ghost), thus the old idea of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is of a Trinity of distinct Persons somehow unified in one Godhead. But the truth is that the Greek pronoun for *he* is the same as the one for *it*.

In other words, the original text does not distinguish between the masculine and the neuter gender, so the use of the word, *He* is a choice – not necessarily a bad choice, since it is the Lord Himself who promised to come again in this spiritual form, but still one that can be misleading if we're not careful.

In fact, the Spirit of Truth is not a separate Person at all but the power, energy and work of the Lord's truth IN us as it affects us. It is the sense or concept of truth, the real meaning of it as it applies to our lives. This is what the Lord promised to provide when His disciples were really ready for it, and this is what He has provided in the relatively new revelation of the spiritual *sense* of His Word.

We'll come back to this in a moment. But for now, think again about what you would do if you had an important message to communicate but the person who needed to hear it just wouldn't listen, or perhaps couldn't understand. One way of turning up the volume is to become more and more insistent, urging and pressing the person to hear. The appeal to reason is another way we try to get attention, offering analogies and explanations to convince. But in the end, we have to realize that if the person doesn't want to hear, he won't, or if he does, he'll soon forget, or go defiantly some other way. And so we have to wait until the time is right, which often comes as a result of some personal crisis or felt need.

Consider again the Lord's problem: how in the world can He get His vital message across to people who just don't get it – or don't get the importance of it?

Oversimplifying, there are two main groups who need this message: those who have the Word but don't understand it properly, and those who don't have it or don't think they need it. The Lord's original followers were especially in the first category: they actually heard Him speak and saw His miracles, but still they didn't really understand what He was about. Many Christians today are also like this, and we may be, too, if we're not paying attention. But the Lord is patient and waits for all of us until we're ready to listen.

For the disciples who followed Him in the world the Lord's first opportunities to be really clear came after His resurrection when they were, as He had predicted, discouraged and scattered, fearing for the loss of their inspired, charismatic leader. But when He revealed Himself to them in His glorified body they were overwhelmed with joy and relief and were so

convinced of His power that they took His message fearlessly throughout the Roman world, despite serious persecution.

But then gradually, through the ages afterwards, the impact of His teachings became diluted, and mixed with all sorts of pagan ideas like the multiple personalities of God and the sacrificial blood atonement, corrupting the truth. So, it was necessary for the Lord to come again – as He also had predicted, but how? What could He now do that He hadn't done before to get through, to help people understand, to make a lasting impression? And what could He say that would get the attention of unbelievers, or the worldly minded, and help them to understand?

Well, in order to be sure people really were and are ready to listen, rather than appearing in a bolt of lightning or an overwhelming vision, we believe He appeared in the age of enlightenment to a specially trained and talented individual who could present His teachings in a calm, dispassionate and yet compelling manner so that anybody who is genuinely interested can get the message. We believe that man was Emanuel Swedenborg, whose birth date happens to be on the 28th of this month (January), and we believe that message is the Spirit of Truth – the spiritual sense of the Word.

When you think about the nature of this revelation you will see that it does exactly what any one of us would do in order to get through. First, it turns up the volume of the communication by presenting volume after volume of appeals to the reader – some 35 volumes in English, not counting 30 or more volumes of what we sometimes call his scientific or philosophical works that set the stage for the deeper spiritual concepts involved.

If one book or topic doesn't appeal to the reader then there are others – many others with many different approaches to the same theme – that offer opportunities for us to hear. In addition, there is relentless repetition of key concepts from book to book, so that if we miss something the first time, we are sure to see it later, and when we see it later, then we can integrate it with what we have learned before.

Among all these presentations are, more than anything, the most urgent and interesting appeals to reason. Every chapter and paragraph of every single book is written with a view to explaining what it is about in a logical progression of thought that flows from generals to particulars, from principles to applications, from over-riding concepts to the details of everyday life. In fact, the style of the revelation is so formal and so carefully constructed that we may at times find it tedious, especially if we're not in the mood for it.

On the other hand, the style is so consistent that we can skim just about any book and get the gist of it by simply reading the first paragraphs of each chapter and the first few lines of each passage. The rest is all supporting evidence and illustrations. And it is all integrated, from one volume to another,

in the most comprehensive, systematic theology of any religious writings in the history of the world.

Finally, the illustrations in these books can be stunning, often heart-warming, and they, too, are given to help convince, but from the burden of experience, and not just logic alone. So, in one passage we find Swedenborg saying:

*I foresee that many who read the following descriptions and the accounts at the ends of the succeeding chapters will believe they are figments of my imagination. I swear in truth, however, that they are not inventions, but actual occurrences to which I was witness. Nor were they witnessed in any condition of unconsciousness but in a state of full wakefulness. For it has pleased the Lord to manifest Himself to me and send me to teach the doctrines that will be doctrines of the New Church, the church meant by the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation. To this end He has opened the inner faculties of my mind and spirit. As a result, it has been made possible for me to be in the spiritual world with angels and at the same time in the natural world with men, and this now for 25 years. (Conjugial Love 1, published in 1768)*

This may sound preposterous at first, but in fact the general principle is consistent with every revelation ever given to the human race – in any religion!

So, Swedenborg is associated with the Spirit of Truth, not because he is that Spirit, but because through him the Lord has revealed Himself in ways that were not possible before, and that have the power to help us believe in and understand His Word – which is why the Holy Spirit is called the *Helper, the Comforter*, or in the old translations, the *Paraclete*, a Greek word from a verb that means to beseech or exhort as well as to comfort, to walk alongside us and so to be with us.

Do the new teachings not beseech or exhort us to believe? Do they not comfort us with new understanding? Thousands of people in recent years have watched inspiring videos about what Swedenborg wrote, and they have said that they do! So, as Swedenborg himself wrote more than once about the deeper truths and holiness of Scripture:

*In order to remove all doubt as to such being the character of the Word, the Lord has revealed to me the Word's internal sense. In its essence this sense is spiritual, and in relation to the external sense, which is natural, is as the soul is to the body. This sense is the spirit which gives life to the letter; it can therefore bear witness to the divinity and holiness of the Word, and convince even the natural man, if he is willing to be convinced. (Sacred Scripture 4, True Christian Religion 192)*

That said, let's go back to the Gospel of John and review the teachings about the Holy Spirit. This is from chapter 14, the whole context of which

includes the Lord's clear declaration to Philip and the other disciples that *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*, thus that the heavenly Father is IN Him as the soul is in its own body. Notice how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are ALL one, all manifested in the wisdom of His Word. We read,

*If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:15-18; 26)*

Let's think about this carefully. "*I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that HE may abide with you forever.*" **He** in this sentence is the Father, and the point is that **He**, our heavenly Father, may abide with us forever. And how does He do that: in the Spirit of His own truth which the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

The point is that the Spirit of Truth is not a Person apart from Jesus any more than Jesus is a Person apart from the Father. The Father is IN Him and the Holy Spirit is Himself as He affects us with His love and power. In fact, as He plainly says concerning that Spirit – the Helper, the Comforter – *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.* And how will He come to us: by presenting the real meaning, the spiritual meaning of His own Word in a new body of teaching that empowers us with wisdom and understanding to keep His commandments and receive His incredible blessings.

But the thing is, in order to preserve our freedom, this new teaching had to be presented by means of a living person, a person of flesh and blood, not unlike the prophets of old, whose word could be accepted or not, but in this case, by who had the credentials of such extraordinary intellect, experience and philosophical discipline (not to mention scientific knowledge) that he could counter the usual arguments against what he observed.

Indeed, we could say his special role, his particular role, was that of a highly trained *observer*. After all, Swedenborg didn't invent any novel or extravagant doctrines, he simply saw what the Scriptures really mean and how the laws of spiritual life really work, and with his typical insightful discipline, meticulously wrote all this information down so that we could see it, too, and understand it, and use it for good.

In that sense he did nothing more than light a lamp and shine its light on the Word itself. But what a powerful and radiant light that is! And what a labor of love it was for him to write it all down – at least 18,000 pages, originally written in Latin, with a quill pen – twice! (He wrote two drafts of everything to

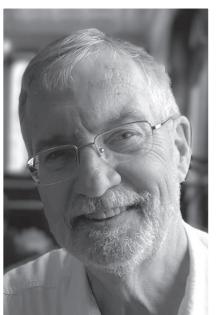
make sure it was right, and published every one of them with his own money, most of them without even attaching his name as their author.)

So, are we convinced? If we are it will not be just because of some eccentric 18th century Swedish polymath's claims, but rather because we see the truth – the Spirit of Truth – flowing out of the Word itself in what he wrote. For as he said: "*The Second Coming of the Lord is not in person, but in the Word, which is from Him, and which is Himself. (True Christian Religion 776)*

This is the Helper, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit whom the heavenly Father sends in His name, which will teach us all things, and which will bring to our remembrance all things that HE has said to us. (*John 14:26*)

Amen.

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# Emanuel Swedenborg: Servant of the Lord

A True Story for the Young

*The Rev. Carl Th. Odhner*

Editor's note: Marvin Clymer, Digital Collections Supervisor at Swedenborg Library, came across a book about Swedenborg written by the Rev. Carl Theophilus Odhner in 1900, which includes this chapter: *A Visit to Swedenborg*. It was written as a story for children and is offered as part of our celebration of Swedenborg's 368th birthday on January 29.

## A Visit to Swedenborg

Many interesting things have been told by a great many people about Swedenborg himself; how he looked and acted, and what kind of a home he had. In this chapter we have brought together many of these things and woven them into a connected story, which, let us suppose, is told by some of the many visitors who came to see Swedenborg at his home in Stockholm. All the incidents mentioned are facts; it is a story only in form.

• • •

During the year 1769 people in Sweden were greatly excited about the many wonderful things which were told respecting Emanuel Swedenborg: his conversations with people in the other world, and his new doctrines, which were much admired by the few who had read his books, but bitterly hated by the many who declared that they never had read and never would read his writings.

I was at this time a young student at the University of Upsala and had heard a great deal both for and against Swedenborg. Some said he was a prophet from God, and some said he was a madman, but all agreed that he had said and done things which were, indeed, most remarkable. Once, in Stockholm, for instance, he happened to be at a dinner-party in Gottenburg, when he suddenly informed the company that a great fire had just broken out in Stockholm, nearly 300 miles away, and that his own house was in great danger.

After a while he said that a great portion of the southern part of Stockholm

had burned down, but that his own house had been saved. The company did not know what to think about this, but Swedenborg's words were repeated to many in Gottenburg, and great was the astonishment when three days later a messenger arrived from Stockholm bearing news of the fire just as it had been described by Swedenborg.

At another time he had been invited to the royal castle in Stockholm, where the queen, Louisa Ulrica, asked him in a teasing way if it was really true that he could speak with people who had left this world. He answered "Yes," and the queen, in order to try him, asked if he would be willing to carry a message to her brother, Prince Augustus William of Prussia, who had died a short time before. Swedenborg replied, "With all my heart."

The queen, who really believed there was no such thing as a life after this, told the courtiers about Swedenborg's promise and joked a good deal about it. But a few days afterward, he came again to the castle, walked boldly up to the queen, and asked to speak with her in private. She took him aside and he whispered a few words in her ear which so astonished her that she nearly fainted. Many people at the court witnessed this scene, and the queen afterward told them that Swedenborg had indeed given her a message from her brother, which revealed a secret that could have been known to her brother and herself. What the secret was she would not tell anybody, but she never again made merry about Swedenborg.

Many similar tales were told about this wonderful man, but some tried to explain them in one way, and some in another, and so, in order to judge for myself, I decided to look into some of the works which Swedenborg had written and which he had presented to the library of the university. I read and read, first from curiosity, afterward with the greatest astonishment, and finally with the most intense joy and gratitude to the Lord for the immeasurable new world of light which had been opened to me in these Writings. Then I became possessed of an uncontrollable desire to see with my own eyes this most wonderful of all mortals who had ever trodden this earth, Emanuel Swedenborg, who styled himself so simply, "the servant of the Lord."

And so, one day in May, 1770, I took the stage from Upsala to Stockholm, arriving in the afternoon. The next day I inquired for Swedenborg's address, and, finding it without difficulty, I walked out to the southern part of the city and up the Hornsgatan, where Swedenborg lived. I found myself before his house, an old-fashioned wooden building, low and small, but neat and well kept, humble enough for so great a man, but sufficient for his wants as an unmarried man.

I knocked, and the door was opened by a friendly, honest-looking old woman, Fru Anderson, the wife of the gardener. She led me into a nicely furnished parlor and courteously inquired what I wanted. I explained why I

had come and heard with regret that Herr Assessor had gone out for a walk. But as he was soon expected home, she suggested I should wait, and in the meantime look at his house and garden. The master would not object, as he kept open house to his many visitors.

To this invitation I quickly agreed, and the kind-hearted, talkative old servant at once began to show me the rooms. His parlor was neatly furnished but showed the absence of the beautifying hands of a wife. In the middle of the room stood a curious marble table, inlaid with mosaic in the form of a pack of cards spread out loosely. On one of the walls I noticed an old painting representing our mad hero, King Charles XII, in the midst of the fury of battle. On another wall was the framed patent of nobility which was kept by Swedenborg as the head of his family.

The master did not spend much time in his parlor, the old lady informed me, but was nearly always in his study, where he was writing day and night, year after year. The servant was evidently very fond and proud of her master. According to her (and others), he was the wisest and most learned man in the whole world, and his company was sought by all the great men in Sweden, the bishops of the church, the professors of the universities, and gentlemen of the court; nay, he was even received as a familiar friend by the members of the royal family.

At this point I began to feel myself rather small, and somewhat regretted my audacity in intruding myself upon so grand a lord; but I regained my courage when the kind old soul informed me that her dear master, in spite of all this glory, was nevertheless the most humble and simple-hearted of men, courteous and benevolent to high and low alike, and cold only to some impertinent people who came to gaze upon him as a wizard or fortune-teller.

The only fault she had ever found with him was that he did not care to go to church, and that he never gave any money to the beggars; but she was no longer worried about this, after the master had shown her that the people did not really worship the Lord Himself in the Lutheran and other churches, but three Divine persons instead.

As for the beggars, she now agreed with her master that they were mostly an idle lot who did not deserve much sympathy, but she had been informed by one of the officers of the parish, that Herr Swedenborg every year quietly gave a big sum of money to help those poor people in the neighborhood who did not go begging.

Chatting in this manner the old lady led me into the bedroom, which was furnished with great simplicity. An old-fashioned chiffonier, a washstand, some chairs, a high bedstead in an alcove surrounded with heavy curtains, and on a wall a newly-painted portrait of himself – this was all the furniture. A large water pitcher in a bowl on the washstand surprised me somewhat, as a

gossip had told me that Swedenborg never needed to wash himself, as no dirt ever clung to him.

My guide told me that her master was a rather irregular sleeper, going to bed only when he was sleepy, and arising whenever he had slept enough. Sometimes he stayed in bed for days, and then nobody dared to disturb him, for he was then continually in heaven with the angels. I gazed with awe and reverence upon this bed, where in the visions of the night the inhabitants of another world descended to the silent sleeper. To me it seemed as if I stood near the gate of the eternal life.

I followed Fru Anderson into his study, where Swedenborg each morning made a fire of birch wood in the open grate and prepared his simple breakfast – generally bread soaked in hot milk. He did not seem to need a great deal of food, and seldom ate any meat, but was rather fond of coffee, which he took at any time in the day, always filling the cup half full of sugar.

Looking about this study, where he had written nearly all of the Sacred Writings of the New Church, I was astonished at the absence of books and bookcases. Nothing of this kind was to be seen, except, on a table, the Word in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, a set of his own theological writings, and some manuscript indexes to these works. These were all he needed now: the rest of his library was kept in a small house in the garden. On his writing table there was nothing except a handsome inkstand, a goosequill pen, and the yet unfinished manuscript of his great work, *The True Christian Religion*, on which he was still at work.

Spellbound, I looked at this writing table, where the light of heavenly truth had come down to earth in the form of written words. And in these words the Lord Himself is now speaking openly with men. He has come again as the Divine Truth itself, and yet how few have listened to His voice! But we must wait with patience; wait for hundreds of years perhaps, until the eyes and ears of men be opened for the truth. In time it will be received, though the opposing darkness be as strong as death and as black as hell.

I looked up over the table, through the open window. Outside, in the garden, I saw the signs of early spring – our lovely northern spring. The fruit trees were budding and blossoming, the snowdrops and narcissuses were swaying to and fro in the balmy wind which wafted their fragrance to me, together with the clear notes of a flock of migratory birds above, who were returning from their southern homes.

There was spring in the north, and signs of spring in human hearts. The truth had come again into the world, like a breath from heaven. The winter of the church was passing away, and here, in this lowly dwelling, lived the herald of that new age which was to restore to mankind the youth and beauty of a never-ending spring.

Out of these meditations I was finally awakened by my guide, who now invited me to come out into the garden. Here we met her husband, the gardener, a kindly old man, who eagerly began to show me the things of interest in his special domain. Among the trees I noticed a variety of choice fruit trees and a number of box trees which, in the fashion of those days, were clipped and trimmed into the shape of various animals and ornamental figures.

In front of the house there were several large flowerbeds, containing rare Dutch tulips and other early flowers. At the side of the house was a small conservatory, in which were kept palms and other southern plants. The gardener said his old master loved these flowers and plants almost as tenderly as if they were his children. But he loved still better little human children.

“The little folks always miss him greatly when he goes away on his foreign journeys,” the old man continued. “They are his special favorites. He often allows them to play in his garden, and sometimes joins in their games and merriment. They are always on the lookout when he is coming, for he generally has his pocket full of cakes and goodies for them.”

For their special amusement he had built a maze or labyrinth of boards in the garden, so contrived that no one who had entered could find the way out without his help. There were several other little buildings in the garden. One was his “summer house,” where he kept his library. Another was built so that he could, by pressing a button, suddenly change it from a square to an octagon. In this building there was also a blind door, which, when opened, showed another door with a window in it, as it seemed. But when I walked up to it, I was surprised to behold – only myself! The “window” was only a large mirror.

The gardener laughingly told me that the old master derived much amusement from this arrangement, especially when inquisitive young ladies were investigating the nooks and corners of his large garden. Once a pretty maiden begged Uncle Swedenborg to please show her one of his angels, and as she would not be put off, he led her to this door and smilingly opened it, saying, “Now, my dear, you shall see an angel. But she saw only her own blushing face.

Much interested in all this, I was about to say farewell, to come again another time, when we were met by the gardener’s wife, who announced that Herr Assessor had just returned from his walk and would be pleased to see me in the parlor. Delighted, but somewhat fearful, I walked quickly to the house, and was met at the door by Emanuel Swedenborg himself, who greeted me with a friendly smile and led me into the room.

I was surprised to see in this very old gentleman an erect and lively person, somewhat thin and pale, perhaps, but strong and manly. His bearing was dignified and venerable, his face thoughtful, refined and innocent, and there was about his whole person something unusual, an atmosphere of purity and holiness such as I cannot exactly describe. On his head he wore a powdered

wig, like all other gentlemen of that time. His mouth was large and firm, but always softened by a gentle smile. His nose was straight and strong, and his eyes were large and of a deep clear blue. They were really remarkable eyes, gentle and soft, yet earnest and penetrating, as if he could read beyond my face the naked features of my very soul.

My host now invited me to take a seat, and asked what he could do for me. I briefly told him my name, and stated that I had not come out of mere curiosity, but from the desire to express to him my gratitude for all the wonderful things which I had learned through the books he had written, and that I had become firmly convinced that the doctrines of the New Jerusalem were the truth itself.

At these words his face was lit up with a tender light; his eyes for a moment seemed filled with tears of joy, and he warmly pressed my hand, saying quickly, "Good! Good!" Then he added, solemnly, "But give the thanks to the Lord alone. I am only a servant. The truth is from the Lord alone, who prepared me for my office from my early youth, and who filled me with His Spirit to teach the doctrines of the New Church through the Word, from Him."

I sat silent for some moments, pondering this statement, then asked: "Is there not, then, anything in all your writings that is from yourself or from your own genius and learning?" To this he answered very earnestly: "I can solemnly testify, in the name of truth, that from the first day of my call I have not received anything whatever from myself, or from any spirit or angel, respecting the doctrines of the New Church, but from the Lord alone, while

reading the Word. When I think of what I am about to write, and while I am writing, I possess a perfect inspiration, for otherwise it would be my own, but now I know for certain that what I write is the living truth of God."

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"Encouraged by his kindness and evident pleasure in dwelling on these great subjects, I asked question after question concerning other teachings still somewhat obscure to me. To all of these he gave most clear and convincing answers, speaking slowly, and at times with a slight stuttering. While we were thus conversing, another visitor was announced, in whom I was delighted to recognize a former comrade of

mine at the university, Sir Carl Robsahm, who, I found, was a great friend of Swedenborg's, and a frequent visitor to his house.

He had come, he said, to invite Herr Assessor to his house for supper, and he now extended the same invitation to myself. Swedenborg, who much enjoyed a social gathering of friends, cheerfully accepted the invitation and withdrew to his bedroom to change his dress. When, after a few moments, he appeared again, he was dressed no longer in his usual simple costume of black knee-breeches and brown coat, but in the garb of a courtier and fine gentleman of high society.

He now wore a suit of black velvet with much fine lace at the neck and the wrists, silk stockings, and low shoes with jewelled buckles. At his side he carried a small sword, curiously hilted and inlaid with silver. In one hand he had his gold-trimmed three-cornered hat, and in the other a gold-headed cane. Altogether, he appeared as handsome and elegant a gentleman of the old type as could be found anywhere. Just before we started out, he produced a silver snuff box, which he passed around, and then with a small golden spoon ceremoniously lifted to his nose a few grains of the perfumed Spanish snuff, which was then the fashion in aristocratic circles.

As we were walking along I was again astonished at the wonderful youthfulness of this very old gentleman. He was as quick on his feet as the youngest man, and walked, in fact, more briskly than was my own custom. He noticed everything about him, and entertained us young men with his lively conversation, spiced now and then with bright but innocent wit.

When arrived at the mansion of Sir Robsahm we found with our young and charming hostess a small company of other guests who hailed with much delight their old friend, Swedenborg, for he was respected and admired by all, whether they agreed with his teachings or not. Among the guests I noticed Count von Hopken, the former Prime Minister of Sweden, who was, perhaps, Swedenborg's most intimate friend; Archbishop Troilius, who agreed with Swedenborg in politics, but disagreed in religion; and a Russian priest, named Oronoskow, who was the chaplain to the Russian ambassador and who also was a believer in Swedenborg's Writings.

At the table Swedenborg ate but little, but with much relish. He joined heartily in the toast to his royal majesty, the king, but filled his glass half full with sugar, and could not be induced to take more than two or three glasses of wine – a thing which rather astonished the other gentlemen, to whom such moderation in drinking was not a usual sight.

During the conversation the Russian chaplain asked Swedenborg whether he had ever seen the late empress Elizabeth of Russia in the other life. He was told that she was now in a very happy state, as she had been a truly good woman at heart, and had always prayed to the Lord for counsel and assistance

in the government of her country. This so delighted the Russian that he was moved to tears of joy in hearing this news of “the little mother,” as the empress had been called by her loving people.

There was a wonderful sphere about Swedenborg’s conversation. Whenever he spoke all other voices were hushed, and even those who were inclined to ridicule were shamed into silence, as this most venerable old man, with his smiling, innocent eyes, told these unheard-of things, strange and yet unanswerable, concerning a world so far and yet so near to us.

After supper, while the other gentlemen went to enjoy a game of cards, Swedenborg and some of the younger men remained with the ladies, who seemed grateful for this attention. Some of the younger ladies, I noticed, seemed to be rather amused that the old gentleman, in a certain absent-mindedness, had put on odd shoes, one having a buckle of gems, and the other a buckle of silver. But then, he had no wife in this world to look after such little things.

After some small talk on various subjects, such as the pet cats and little dogs in the room who jumped up on his knees to show their little tricks, Swedenborg happened to see a harpsichord and requested the ladies to favor us with some music. During the performance of a difficult and celebrated sonata, he beat the time with his foot and seemed to enjoy the music greatly. This friend of flowers and children and the gentle sex could not but include music also in his love of all things innocent and beautiful.

Promptly at seven o’clock Swedenborg took his leave, explaining that he never stayed out after that hour. I accompanied him on his way. Never will I forget that walk in the mysterious twilight of our northern spring. The most memorable day of my life was drawing to a close. I could not hope to meet again this citizen of two worlds, this man among men and angel among the angels, for he told me that he would soon leave Sweden for Amsterdam, where he would publish his last great work, *The True Christian Religion*.

Most useful had this visit been to me. I felt that though he was the best and wisest among men, he still was but a man, my elder brother in the Lord’s New Church. I felt, when he was explaining to me the mysteries of my new faith, that he himself was not the inventor or discoverer of the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem, but that they had been given to him from the Lord Himself.

When at last our all-too-short walk was at an end, and I regretfully bade him adieu before his door, he affectionately pressed my hand, and earnestly advised me to continue in my study of the Doctrines of the New Church, and not only to believe in them, but also to live according to their teachings.

I saw him no more. In July of the same year he left Sweden, never to return. Having published his book in Holland, he went to London in 1771, and about Christmas time had an attack of paralysis, which made him lame and speechless for a few weeks. After this he recovered somewhat, and was even

able to write a little; but he knew that his time had come, and even told the people about him the exact day on which he would die.

My friend, the Rev. Arvid Ferelius, was at this time the minister of the Swedish church in London, and often visited Swedenborg during his last illness. The faithful old servant of the Lord looked forward to death as joyfully as a schoolboy looks toward his holidays.

During the last visit Ferelius asked him if in his many books he had written what was really true. Swedenborg then lifted himself up in his bed, put his hand upon his heart, and said with great earnestness: "As true as you see me here, and as true as I live, I have not written anything from myself, but the truth from God. And if you will pay attention to the truth you will come to see everything, and we shall some time in eternity have important things to talk over together."

Pastor Ferelius afterward began to read the Writings of the New Church and became a zealous receiver of the truth.

A few days afterward, on the afternoon of March 29 – the day he had foretold – he awakened from a slumber and asked the women who were watching in his room what time of day it was. They answered that it was about five o'clock. He said,

"It is well. I thank you. God bless you," and lovingly bade them farewell. A few minutes afterward he breathed a gentle sigh, and his great spirit passed into that world where he so long had had his real home. Never will this world see such another man.

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SWEDENBORG IN HIS PARLOR, STOCKHOLM

*(Swedenborg was a taller man than is represented by the artist in this picture)*

# Not as the World Gives

A Summary of the Cultural Landscape  
of the Formerly Christian World  
and a Call to Face the Cost of Discipleship

*The Rev. Derrick A. M. Lumsden*

Council of the Clergy 2025

The General Church in North America is facing a challenging cultural landscape to navigate. The purpose of this article is to explore why this cultural landscape is uniquely challenging and how some of the movements of culture have led to where we are.

Since this paper addresses a cultural moment in a particular social context, I have not attempted to address the issue primarily through doctrine but through reason. The value of this investigation is in the question: how do we think about ourselves as a church in relationship to the cultural moment?

This question certainly has doctrinal components. How we address others and assess their state is a question of wisdom: thinking from doctrine. To apply the doctrines well in this context, we need to accurately assess:

- 1) the general state of our society and individual needs within that state
- 2) our current approach to that state

We can see all these things in the light of doctrine. This paper attempts to assess these qualities, through an evaluation of the cultural moment and potential strategies in response.

## **The Current Cultural Moment**

I had been stationed in South Africa for six years, and in returning to the United States in 2014, I felt some fundamental shifts had taken place while I had been out of touch with North American culture. So, I began reading about what was happening socially in the country.

One author I read was Rod Dreher (a former Catholic who converted to Eastern Orthodox). In *The Benedictine Option*, Dreher lays out the history of why the Benedictine monks ended up retreating from a falling and corrupt western culture and how these retreat communities ended up being the preservers of Christianity and Western culture.

This model is not particularly different from the historic General

Church model of leaving cities to create intentionally distinctive New Church communities. So, I thought it interesting that what this book presents as a potential solution to our cultural moment is a model foundational to the Academy/General Church history.

In reading Rod Dreher, I discovered another author: Aaron Renn. He is a Reformed Christian who had worked in a Washington, D.C., think tank, in a business consultancy, and in city planning out of New York City. In the last few years he left city planning to become a full time Christian author based in Indiana, his home state.

Aaron Renn wrote an article a few years ago with profound strategic implications for a church's focus on outreach, and has since expanded the article into a book. His article is published in *First Things*.<sup>1</sup> His book, *Life in the Negative World*, takes his article further and makes recommendations for how to live and thrive in the world he posits we live in.<sup>2</sup>

The central idea of his article and book is expressed this way in *First Things*:

Within the story of American secularization, there have been three distinct stages:

**Positive World (Pre-1994):** Society at large retains a mostly positive view of Christianity. To be known as a good, churchgoing man remains part of being an upstanding citizen. Publicly being a Christian is a status-enhancer. Christian moral norms are the basic moral norms of society and violating them can bring negative consequences.

**Neutral World (1994–2014):** Society takes a neutral stance toward Christianity. Christianity no longer has privileged status but is not disfavored. Being publicly known as a Christian has neither a positive nor a negative impact on one's social status. Christianity is a valid option within a pluralistic public square. Christian moral norms retain some residual effect.

**Negative World (2014–Present):** Society has come to have a negative view of Christianity. Being known as a Christian is a social negative, particularly in the elite domains of society. Christian morality is expressly repudiated and seen as a threat to the public good and the new public moral order. Subscribing to Christian moral views or violating the secular moral order brings negative consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2022/02/the-three-worlds-of-evangelicalism>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Life-Negative-World-Confronting-Anti-Christian/dp/0310155150>

The simple framework of attitude is the nugget of his analysis. The model is certainly not a full picture of the cultural moment or all that is going on; it is like licking your finger to get a sense of the direction of the wind. But knowing the direction of the wind is essential in identifying and responding to cultural moments.

This framework for cultural analysis resonated with me as what I had been experiencing as I tried to re-acclimatize myself to a changed American culture. It was like the temperature had slowly been turned up in my absence; I came back and the water was boiling. I saw a change that I could identify: we live in a culture that has a negative view of Christianity.

I highly recommend the *First Things* article, and if you think it is useful, the book takes things further into application regarding some ideas on how to approach this negative culture. As a caveat, some of the applications are particularly Protestant and Reformed in nature and need some careful reading and critique.

To put a more direct point on it: Christian ideas related to marriage, family and sex identity are under attack. We in the New Church will be and should be tarred with the same brush. The New Church is a True Christian Church, and we cannot and should not try to avoid the reality that what is under attack is fundamental to our faith. This is especially true as we have more reason to be under attack on those fronts than the majority of Christians because of the doctrinal affirmations of the eternal nature of sex and marriage.

### **Neutral World Shaped Strategy**

My education and upbringing were in what Renn termed a neutral world. In this world, there are several ways of communicating that are likely to be successful. You might de-emphasize significant differences and focus on building bridges through shared existing values. You might find it best to put off difficult conversations until you reach a point of shared good where these conversations can be had within the context of an existing relationship. This is a broad-brush way to think about successful communication in this context. Seeker churches generally follow this model (e.g. Saddle Back, Willow Creek, North Point). And given a neutral context, the things articulated here have value and wisdom.

However, in a negative culture these attempts to build bridges will primarily result in being pulled further and further away from the core of Christian beliefs. The difficult truths will be more and more downplayed, and if not, a direct assault will be attempted by those who are negative to those truths.

For a church organization a bridge-building approach will lead toward a practical if not actual denial of her teachings. Essentially, attempting a bridge-building model will likely deform the church as it attempts to stretch and push

to reach a shore that is both actively moving further away, and at the same time bucking to break down the connection.

There are a couple models that can be successful for dealing with a negative culture. One is a retreat model. The other is an island model.

### **A Retreat Model for a Negative World**

A retreat model is what Rod Dreher articulates in *The Benedictine Option*. It is also the model used by the founders of the General Church. As we all know, Bryn Athyn was founded as an intentional move of a whole society from inside Philadelphia to the outer bounds of the existing railways. This move created physical distance from the city and its cultural influence, but allowed for a relatively easy commute for business and professional opportunities of Philadelphia.

Most of our existing church schools in North America were founded in a retreat mode: Bryn Athyn, Caryndale, Glenview, Kempton, Mitchellville, Oak Arbor, Pittsburgh (to some extent). The goal was to buy land further from the city centers, start a school, and create a distinctive New Church culture. The last of these escape communities was founded before we reached 1994 – the inflection point to neutral culture in North America.

For the last 30 years, our focus as a church in North America has been on neutral world strategies, mostly bridge building. During the time since these societies were founded, every single one of these retreat communities has been surrounded by suburban sprawl. When combined with a strategy of bridge building (a valid strategy for a neutral culture), these communities intentionally lowered the barriers to being a distinctive New Church culture. The focus has been on emphasizing similarities and entering into relationships in order to build connections and share New Church teachings.

On the whole, we reached our general and wide-scale acceptance of this strategy about a decade after the cultural shifts took place that formed the foundation of this strategy. It was in the early 2000s that the General Church completely switched her strategy, as evidenced by the million-man mission and growth initiatives for Bryn Athyn College (formally titled Bryn Athyn College of the New Church).

It would be reasonable to say this was a fair strategy for its time; however, things have shifted culturally again since its adoption. As a result of this strategy, combined with the cultural shift, the majority of General Church societies have become immersed in Western Culture – particularly more secular Western Culture.

Given that cultural shift and our immersion in it through a neutral world strategy, I would recommend we intentionally shift our culture away from bridge building to allow us to be appropriately differentiated from a culture

antagonistic to fundamental New Church teachings.

In the book, *Every Man's Talmud*, a rabbi in the introduction states that history is the story of dominant cultures consuming subcultures. He posits that the only thing that has allowed subcultures to survive is either geographic separation or a “burning fire of faith.”

The General Church’s predominant strategy for 100 years was geographic separation. Having grown up within a neutral culture, I thought this was a mistake. I thought the founders of the General Church were mistaken to value a strategy of geographic separation. However, as culture has shifted and I have witnessed the devastation of New Church culture through a closer connection with and even acceptance of secular Western culture, I have come to see the wisdom of this approach and to affirm it in ways that I never thought I would as a college student.

Incidentally, Kempton is one of the only school societies in North America that has not been geographically surrounded nor adopted a bridge-building approach to outreach. Kempton is not really ultra-conservative. It is simply conservative and the rest of the General Church culture has moved away from General Church traditions. One aspect that has allowed for this conservatism, if we believe the rabbi, is simply that it has been able to maintain geographic separation from a neutral and negative culture.

### **A Non-retreat (Island) Approach to a Negative Culture**

Intentionally creating communities with geographic separation is not the only path forward. The other way forward according to the rabbi is to instill a culture with a burning fire of faith. What does that mean? It means a community that is committed to living spiritual truths regardless of what the communities around them are doing – a commitment of love to the truths of faith and a life according to them. It means an internal commitment to a subculture (a distinctive New Church social life to put it in traditional General Church terms) that we choose not to deviate from even as the surrounding communities oppose that subculture and actively work against it.

Scriptural examples of this commitment to subculture can be seen in the Israelitish church surrounded by and oppressed by the Egyptians. Another example would be the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. Or a Christian example would be the founding the Christian church, where the early church was surrounded, oppressed and persecuted by the Jews in Jerusalem and a few centuries later by the Romans. These are examples of subcultures that were so committed to their faith that the dominant culture around them could not consume them.

This strategy of building a **burning fire of faith** is what I think the General Church should primarily adopt. One simple reason is that developing the tools

to build a General Church that has a burning fire of faith would serve the communities with and without geographic separation. It would serve the international communities as well as the North American communities.

Geographic separation can create a buffer, but as we have seen in recent history it can be overcome rather quickly. It would be easier to create new General Church colonies on the fringes of the cities or in rural America than to lead a cultural renewal. And we probably should pursue some island strategy in addition to pursuing a cultural renewal so as to not put all our eggs in one basket.

Geographic separation as its own strategy requires a lot of financial commitment. For geographic separation to be a long-term strategy it would require a commitment to remaining a subculture going forward, even as there are external and internal reasons to lower the bars of separation. And it would require defending the boundaries of that geographic separation even at financial and social cost.

To put it more succinctly, to rely on geographic separation without the fire of faith would require a reliance on the external alone. This reliance is a weak reed which will break and pierce the hand. Cultural renewal and commitment to building a subculture from the inside out is the project that can be more lasting. It is also the project that will not only allow the New Church to survive the years in the wilderness, but it will allow the General Church to provide a place to reside in the midst of the devastation taking place in Western Culture.

I have called this an island approach. To accomplish this, we should create pockets or islands of subculture that maintain a burning fire of faith within a sea of negativity. From an outreach perspective, this island provides a safe haven from that negative world. It is a place where refuge can be sought from a hurt and hurting culture.

### **Count the Cost**

However, I want to warn that there will be a cost to maintaining a subculture within a negative world. It will likely come with various persecutions, both minor and more serious, through losses of reputation and financial costs (both opportunity costs and realized losses).

Persecution will likely be born most heavily by those who are externally successful in business or professions. Lawyers, doctors, politically involved

professions, public educators, and business executives will bear the most direct assault for identifying with and living out a subculture. Small business owners (depending on the field) and service professionals (such as the trades) will likely receive little scrutiny. Hospitality, as we have seen in public lawsuits in the recent past, will likely receive a lot of attention from a negative culture.

I say all this to point out that there will be a cost to an island strategy. A cost that will be brought to bear in different measures depending on what parts of the culture your duties bring you into. I also want to point out that if you are in one of these professions, your professional standards may have pushed you toward a morality incompatible with the doctrines. I remind you that you have a choice. I want to draw your attention to this tension and possible persecution. I would have you be prepared to face the challenge with integrity and intention.

I also want to point out that you could choose to switch careers or choose careers that will minimize the persecution of your choices. Or you could choose a path with the prayer of being prepared to witness to the truths, thereby inviting people into the spiritual haven. We could also build intentional New Church networks to support and distribute the external costs of faithfulness.

To be a subculture living differently than the negative culture will have a cost. I believe it is the best strategy available to us as a church organization, but it will have a high social and even at times economic cost to live out that strategy. If we can enter into that strategy with wisdom, understanding and hope, we can be witnesses of the life of heaven. We can bear the cost and contribute to the Lord's work to establish His Kingdom on earth.



*If we can enter into that strategy with **wisdom**, **understanding** and **hope**, we can be witnesses of the life of heaven. We can bear the cost and contribute to the Lord's work to establish **His Kingdom** on Earth.*

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# The Lord's Example

*The Rev. Grant H. Odhner*

*The first great gift we can bestow on others is a good example.*

*– Thomas Morell*

The place of example is universally recognized. During our formative years our attitudes and behaviors are deeply shaped by the role-models around us. It is by the example of others that we experience the reality of human qualities that are otherwise theoretical: patience, self-discipline, willingness to yield and change, faithfulness in marriage, piety, the ability to relax and have fun.

It is not enough for others simply to tell us what love is or what temperance is: we must be shown what these things are in a life context. Otherwise, our imagination grasps, but then falters from a certain deficiency.

Most Christians believe that Jesus' life was an example for us to follow. Many would say that this example was His greatest legacy to us. Although the Writings show us that the Lord's recorded words and deeds reveal relatively little of what He actually accomplished at His coming, they do agree that His life was an example.

*The Lord's life in the world was an example according to which the people of the church are to live, as the Lord Himself teaches in John: "I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. . . . If you know these things happy are you if you do them." (13:15,17; Apocalypse Explained 54:2)*

And what was the Lord's example? He showed us Divine love, expressed in a Divinely wise way. He showed us love working for its goal: the long-term happiness of others (salvation). He showed us love in its tolerance, love in its mercy, love in its firmness and resoluteness.

The Lord's example was the example of a teacher. He was willing to call people to account – sometimes gently, sometimes with force. We sometimes forget this. We tend to think that we have done our

*The Lord's life in the world was an example according to which the people of the church are to live.*

duty if we have gone quietly about our own business with integrity, leaving others to their own lives and opinions and mistakes. We hope that our actions will bear witness to our beliefs, and that somehow others will be affected, without our tongue having to bear witness.

The Lord wants us to “let our light shine before people.” The disciples were to “make disciples of all nations, teaching them.” They were to be willing to “stand before kings,” and face persecution and rejection, that His message might be received, that those in need might be healed.

The Lord’s own example was not a passive one. He dared to do and say what was true and good, despite its unpopularity. Are we willing to take the risk, even with our loved ones, of articulating the truth that we believe in, in the hope of bending their minds toward a happier state?

The Lord’s teaching ultimately led Him to the cross, to laying down His life for His friends. We will probably never be called on to make such a sacrifice – with our physical life. But we must be following His example each day in our spiritual lives, and to the best of our ability in our natural lives.

*You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. (John 13:13)*

*I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. . . . If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. (John 13:15,17)*

*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (John 15:12)*

*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. (John 20:21)*



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# The Cornerstone of Our Faith

*The Rev. HyunJin Yang*

*Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,  
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;  
Whoever believes will not act hastily. (Isaiah 28:16-17)*

I have recently pondered about the meaning and the weight of living in faith. It also occurs to me that we do face different hardships and challenges from inside and outside along the way, and that there are times that force us to ask what it is all about. And if we do find ourselves struggling, what would help us most to reconnect with the life of our faith? I wonder perhaps if it begins with looking back to the cornerstone of our faith. I wonder if it begins with remembering where it first began for us.

## **The Weight of Living in Our Faith**

In my mind, living in faith or the life of faith are differentiated from going as things go or living as we feel like. It means that we live for something beyond ourselves, beyond our feelings, and beyond what we think we are destined for. In my mind, the life of our faith as a Christian means nothing other than our dedicated life of seeking what the Lord our God says in His Word and of striving to live by it.

And it may certainly be a rugged way, as it is often a direct challenge to our natural love of living as we feel like. It certainly has the uncomfortable “weight” on our shoulder (see *Matthew 11:28*), as the life of our faith means that we continue to seek and stand with what the Lord teaches even when the world and our natural self convince us otherwise.

So, it is often a struggle in choosing the Lord’s pathway over the natural way that we are innately drawn to. It is often a struggle of trying to listen for His voice among many noises and to see where His truth lies in the middle of the world we live in. And none of us is spared from somehow skipping this step on the way. It is part of the life of our faith.

In other words, we may find times where it is not our faith in the Lord but faith in something else or ourselves that is at the helm of our life. Along the way, we may feel that our faith has become a tradition in the forms of thoughts. We may find ourselves thinking that it is no different than going to church on Sunday or being reminiscent of memories of the Lord’s teachings from afar. We might even feel as though the “weight” is not on our shoulder to proudly

and humbly bear but it is oppression in the heart that we no longer want.

### **What Is the Cornerstone of Our Faith?**

We all experience ups and downs. So, we will experience high points, where we feel confident that we're really living out our faith in the Lord, and where things just make sense without needing to try hard to make them make sense for us. But how should we renavigate if we find ourselves at one of the low points? How do we find our way back? Wouldn't it be helpful if we started digging down to the root of our faith, asking ourselves where it begins, or rather where it first began for us?

We may find other questions to be relevant, such as: What was the most important teaching that touched us down to our spirit, not just our intellect? What was one truth that found us and led us out of confusion (or out of the wilderness) and into our love to the Lord and His Church?

One that touched me recently was that the Lord desires and wills to share His life – His love and wisdom – with us in every single moment. (See *Heaven and Hell* 399) He can't possibly do otherwise because such is His Divine characteristic that cannot change.

There are teachings that are basic but fundamental as such that will gravitate us back to our faith in the Lord regardless of where we may be. A cornerstone of truth may differ for everyone. And then, what was yours that touched you deeply and became the foundational support of the life of your faith in the Lord? Or was there a teaching or what the Lord says in the Word that affected your life in some? Wouldn't it be helpful if you could look back to it?

### **Who Is the Cornerstone of Our Faith?**

Wherever we may find ourselves, it is always good to look back and reflect on where it all began for us. Even as a people of congregation, we should ask something similar: what is the cornerstone of our faith? One thing to be grateful about it is that there is nothing to argue about it! The most Christian and New Church faith sits on the faith that the Lord Jesus Christ is our God, the only God. (See *Matthew 28:18; John 17:2; True Christianity* 294). It is our faith in Him that should support every other aspect of our life of faith. (See *Ephesians 2:20*)

There is power – in fact great power – in seeing the Lord as the cornerstone of our faith and life. This is to say that we allow our life to be built on the Lord and His guidance. That we put our trust in God whose wisdom and support are as solid as the bedrock that is not moving nor failing. But this is also to

say that we are not putting our trust so much in ourselves who are fallible and weak on our own. This may sound like weakness on our end, but in this faith, we may discover great comfort, and it is there that we can reconnect with the life of our faith in the Lord again.

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# Declarations of Faith

## **The Rev. Sylvanus Charles Karikari**

I believe in the One True God who descended into this world in the person of the Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ in who is the Divine Trinity. I believe that evils must not be done because they come from the devil. Goods must be done because they come from God and are of God. I believe that all goods things done by a person are from God with a person. However, it is done from himself.

## **Statement of Purpose**

I avail myself to the Spirit of Truth to lead and guide me to expand the New Church to where it is not known and help create an awareness and acceptance in people living in those areas. Also, I promise under the Lord's leadership to help organize the New Church groups or societies established among them so that it could have firm basis in those places. So help me God.

## **The Rev. Benjamin Ebo Saah Hayford**

I have presented myself to be ordained into the priesthood of the New Church. I now confess my faith.

I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ in His Human is the only God of heaven and earth, and the Savior in Whom is the Divine Trinity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

I believe that the Holy Scripture is from the Lord, and it is the Lord Himself, and it contains a spiritual meaning, and the Ten Commandments are the totality of the meaning of the Holy Scripture, which a person must obey to be in the Lord, that is, to have salvation.

I believe that evils must be shunned as sins against the Lord because evil is the devil, and good must be done according to the truths of faith because good is from the Lord God Almighty.

## **Statement of Purpose**

The Lord created the universe and the human race so that from created humans He would form a heaven of angels. He effects this by means of teachings and instructions from His Word.

My purpose of becoming a New Church minister is to learn the truths of the church so as to disseminate them for the salvation of souls. May the Good Lord help me to perform this duty effectively to the glory of His Holy Name.

## BISHOP HEINRICH'S VISITS WEST AFRICA (SEE REPORT ON PAGE 59)



Dedication of the church in Ningokope, with the Rev. John Segbenu and Bishop Heinrichs

The Rev. Benedict Morris, center, ordained in Monrovia, Liberia, with West African Regional Pastor Sylvain Agnes, left, and Bishop Bradley Heinrichs, right, officiating.



A visit to the Theological School in Côte d'Ivoire.

The ordinations of Rev. Sylvanus Karikari (second from right) and Rev. Benjamin Ebo Saah Hayford, right. From the left: Ghana National Pastor Ekow Eshun, West African Regional Pastor Emeritus Gyamfi Martin, Bishop Brad Heinrichs and the Rev. Scott Frazier.



Cathy Heinrichs, left, with Monica Segbenu, at her confirmation and the baptism of her daughter.



## YOUTH WEEKEND IN TORONTO



First day gathering



Youth weekend leaders, from left: The Revs. Erik Buss, Todd Beiswenger and Brett Buick



Working at a craft table



In ubiquitous pink ponchos, ready to brave the mist under the Falls



# Life Lines

*Bruce M. Henderson and the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons*

## KIT ROGERS: TEACHING WITH LOVE

After a Bryn Athyn Church School graduation years ago, Kit Rogers was hugging and kissing her kindergarten students, with tears in her eyes, and my wife commented: “Isn’t that sweet? Mrs. Rogers is saying goodbye to her students – and she’s crying!” One of our kids said: “Oh, Mom. She does that every day.”

That was Kit Rogers. She was the epitome of everyone’s favorite kindergarten teacher – legendary, devoted, loving, genuine – the ultimate New Church teacher.

Kirsten (Kit) Rogers passed away in October after a long, brave battle against cancer. She and her husband, the Rev. Bruce Rogers, had been constants in the Bryn Athyn Church, community and schools all their married lives – almost 60 years. And now she is gone. But no one will forget.

How do you forget a teacher who – as the Rev. Eric Carswell noted in his Memorial Address – had “the signature habit of giving each student a gentle kiss at the end of each day of school?” And how do you forget a legacy that lives on in the elementary school’s Christmas program every year, with uninhibited kindergarteners singing and acting out *The Twelve Days of Christmas*?

Kit would consider herself just one of countless New Church teachers who devote their lives to touching and shaping lives well beyond the classroom, with a love channeled straight out of heaven. But she was the model.

Great teachers connect beyond the classroom, forever touching and influencing young lives. Kit was one of the special ones who teach by and through the example of living what she believed: that “*children are a heritage from the Lord*,” to be taught in the sphere of the Lord’s love.

She was not just a teacher when she entered a kindergarten classroom. She was a teacher all her life – by the way she modeled what she loved and set an example with every facet of her life: with kindness, integrity, humility, always looking for the good, and loving the Lord by feeding His sheep – and His lambs.



Rev. Carswell quoted a granddaughter who felt “so wrapped up in her love and care whenever I was with her, with hugs and kisses at any moment. Most importantly, feeling her love in every single thing she did. Seeing her capacity to sincerely love those around her was inspiring.”

And a niece said: “She was one of those rare people who made everyone around them, regardless of their age, background, or anything else, feel welcome, important, and loved. This is the essence of Aunt Kit to me. Someone genuinely committed to and enthusiastic about loving others and treating them with kindness and empathy.”

The great poet John Donne wrote what could be an epitaph for Kit Rogers and her place in the lives of so many students, friends and family members:

*Our children are watching us live, and what we are shouts louder than anything we can say.*

And Henry James added another:

*Fine teachers attain a kind of immortality because it is impossible to know when, or if, their value ever stops.*

We can be sure that Kit’s love of teaching did not stop when she retired, and certainly not when she left this world, but will continue to eternity – with lots of hugs and kisses,

Becoming an angel in heaven will be nothing new for Kit Rogers.

(BMH)

## A LEGACY OF CARING

Kit Roger’s legacy lives in the memories of countless students, parents and colleagues. One lasting example is an article she wrote for *New Church Life – (New Church Education for People with Special Challenges*, May 2008, page 176). It was mentioned by the Rev. Eric Carswell in his Memorial Address for Kit and embodies her passion for all that New Church education can and should be in this world.

Her article begins with her awakening. First it was a little girl from an out-of-town New Church family who visited Bryn Athyn Church School for a few days. She had a big heart and a winning way but severe physical limitations. She “enriched our days and broadened our horizons at the same time.” But Kit realized they would not have been equipped to accommodate her.

A few years later a local Mom called about a daughter who needed braces and crutches or a wheelchair. “Then she asked a question that simply stunned me. Would her daughter be allowed to come to our school?” She could not

help but think: "New Church parents should never have to ask whether their children might attend New Church schools."

That was the dawn of an enlightenment that has brought changes to schools everywhere – not just New Church schools – doing their best to meet the needs of all children.

For Kit it was a dramatic realization that our elementary schools had to expand their capabilities to serve all New Church children. Always sweet and caring as a teacher, she was also willing to challenge herself and our schools – not content to be good but to strive to be better.

Rev. Carswell quoted from her article:

*Should not all our New Church children be welcomed into our schools? Should not all New Church teachers be willing to develop programs that would help even those with challenges grow up with their friends, in their communities, and with the Lord and His Church at the center of their lives? Doctrine, the historic purposes of New Church education, and many current educational trends all seem to invite, indeed to urge, an affirmative response. All the children of the church are our children. New Church education exists to serve them all.*

Kit's focus was properly on our schools and families, but the issue goes beyond special education for special needs. It is a challenge to every school, every church, every business, every government: how do we keep making them better? And it is a challenge to each of us: are we satisfied with the status quo, or should we always be willing to stretch to be better?

This brings to mind the 2001 best seller *Good to Great* by Jim Collins that prodded consciences beyond the business world with the notion that "good is the enemy of great." It's easy to feel that "we're good" – and that that's enough. But that is not reaching for excellence.

Jim Collins says in his book:

*We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don't have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in part because it's just so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good – and that is their main problem.*

If we extend down to the personal level, we know that we are called to regenerate – to be striving all our lives to become better people by shunning the evils we incline to and choosing to love the Lord and the neighbor. That is the path to greatness. That is the path to becoming an angel.

Call it greatness, call it regeneration, call it the perfection that goes on to all eternity, it is always a dynamic process, not an end point. It is something

always to be asking of ourselves, our institutions, our schools, our church. There is nothing negative or elitist about striving for continual improvement. We are not asked to be perfect – just always working to be better. And that is all we are asked to do on our path to heaven.

(BMH)

## WHERE WE LAY UP OUR TREASURES

Do you ever wonder when reading the Word, or any kind of history, where these people are now? Did their lives and loves lead them to heaven or hell? Sometimes we may feel we can guess; other times we have no idea. It all depends on where they laid up their treasures:

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)*

I was reflecting on this recently while reading a book – *The Last Days of Night* by Graham Moore – the landmark patent lawsuit between Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse about who invented the electric light, and thus virtually owned the future of electricity in the United States. That sounds deadly dull but it is a riveting tale about two of the most powerful men in the world who gave so much to us. But were they too wrapped up in their own rewards to think about where this was leading them in their eternal life?

We know many people like this and can only wonder. In addition to Edison and Westinghouse, that period records the lives of John Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt and others. And, of course, John Pitcairn, who was known as the conscience of his contemporaries because his church was more important to him than any of his business ventures. Most of these men were known as “robber barons” – ruthless in their pursuit of power and wealth. There is a telling book about Pittsburgh titans and partners, Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick, who became bitter rivals over a bloody steelworkers’ strike. The withering title of the book: *I'll Meet You in Hell*.

But we cannot judge. Westinghouse was said to be a true gentleman. And Carnegie felt it would be a sin to die rich so most of his fortune went to building libraries all over America.

We may wonder, too, about the eternal fate of rock stars, movie idols, sports celebrities, business and political leaders, who come to expect the special status of fame and wealth. They may be surprised to find there are 12

gates to heaven – but no VIP gate. Death is the great equalizer. People used to “having it all” may be shocked to find they have no special claim in the afterlife. Some may actually feel grateful to be free of the curse of celebrity. Some may never get over their love of power and influence. We cannot know. We just know that all of them – as with all of us – judge themselves according to what they love most and thereby find their true home.

It all comes down to where we have “laid up our treasures.”

(BMH)

## WHAT IS AN OVERTON WINDOW?

An AI definition describes it this way:

*The Overton window is a model that describes the range of policy positions considered acceptable or mainstream by the public at a given time. It is not static; the window of what is considered “acceptable” can shift or expand over time due to factors like social movements, public discourse, and activism. Politicians tend to support policies within this window to remain electable, while ideas outside of it risk losing popular support.*

According to the same source:

*“the term is named after the American policy analyst and former senior vice president at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Joseph Overton, who proposed that the political viability of an idea depends mainly on whether it falls within an acceptability range, rather than on the individual preferences of politicians using the term or concept.”*

While this is a political term, the same thinking applies to our religious thinking and conversations. Religious leaders, and each of us in our conversations with friends both inside and outside of our church, are usually conscious of the boundaries between acceptable ideas and unusual ones. These naturally vary according to who we are speaking with, but most people try to stay within the limits as they perceive them.

Many New Church teachings lie within mainstream public opinion in most places where the church exists, at least among religious people. Beliefs such as that there is a God, that Jesus Christ is that God, that heaven and hell exist, that we should live according to the Ten Commandments and the Word of God, and belief in Divine providence and the sanctity of marriage, are all concepts that religious people don’t usually argue with. But most of us are aware that asserting that the Second Coming has already happened, that

Swedenborg received revelations, that we know what heaven and hell are like, and that we know what the inner meaning of the Bible is, are not likely to find automatic agreement from most people. Even more, most people are aware today that any kind of assertions about gender and sexuality are likely to spark controversy.

Interestingly, though, there are quite a few unique New Church teachings which find ready acceptance from many people, and there are even ideas that are widely believed despite being contrary to the doctrines of other Christian churches. Examples would be things such as that after we die we go to heaven or hell, and that where we go depends on the kind of life that we have led. Another would be that true love lasts forever and that we are married in heaven. Another is that the Lord cares about the kind of life that we live, not our specific religious denomination.

The point of the concept of the Overton window is about what is politically acceptable, and therefore what kinds of measures and policies are likely to be accepted and signed into law, or be useful in winning elections. The implications of the idea for religion have more to do with the likelihood of people accepting and practicing the doctrine.

The beauty of the idea is that it acknowledges that this window is always changing, so that ideas that were once unacceptable may become accepted, and vice versa, as society changes. Similarly, it varies across cultures. Unlike terms like “norms,” “standards,” “customs” and “appropriate” the Overton window is often referred to as an unwelcome and unfairly restrictive social reality that prevents many good ideas and practices from taking root. It invites new ideas that may bring about improvement.

Everyone should be aware of and sensitive to the norms of their social environment, but at the same time it is useful to work to extend those norms. It isn’t always comfortable to express beliefs that are outside of the mainstream, but streams by their very nature are always changing and we are all part of the change.

(JFS)

## A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

There’s a thought-provoking article on page 37 of this issue by the Rev. Derrick Lumsdsen, which was presented to the Council of the Clergy last year: *Not as the World Gives – A Summary of the Cultural Landscape of the Formerly Christian World and a Call to the Cost of Discipleship*.

Derrick cites dramatic shifts in Christian culture in the United States in recent years and with them emerging implications and challenges for the New Church. His article deserves a careful reading and hopefully will inspire

thoughtful responses, from clergy and laity, about how the church – and all of us – should respond.

He says that when he returned to the United States from six years as a pastor in South Africa, he was alarmed at fundamental shifts in American culture – much of it revolving around faith and religion. He cites studies that this culture has evolved from pro-Christian (pre-1994) to a more neutral state through 2014, but a decidedly negative view of Christianity since.

We see this played out not only in emptier pews in our churches – all churches – but enmeshed in the social media culture, from websites and podcasts to TV and movies. It is an insidious and threatening presence.

Churches everywhere are struggling for relevance these days although there are encouraging signs that the pendulum is swinging back toward faith, especially among our young people – and in spite of the radical activism playing out on college campuses and protest sites.

The implications of this cultural shift are nowhere more critical and demanding than in the New Church: the crown of all churches, descending from God out of heaven as the salvation of the world.

That makes the new Vision for the General Church – vested in the Lord’s call, “who will go for us?” and the response, “Here I am, Lord. Send me” – all the more timely and critical.

Derrick’s conclusion is that the only way to resist the threatening negative culture is to shift from an “island strategy” to “a burning fire of faith within a sea of negativity.”

That means being absolutely clear about what we stand for as a church, which is generally what we strive to do through doctrine. Many churches throughout Christianity have chosen a more inclusive approach, thinking that will make them more popular. For a while that works, but studies show that churches trying to be all things to all people may experience an initial boost in attendance but that it eventually gives way to a longing for the surer pillars of faith. Meanwhile, churches that are firm and clear about what they believe in are growing.

The General Church has had its own struggles with upholding doctrine in recent years, particularly with issues of sexuality and women in the ministry. The church has been clear in its doctrinal positions while trying also to come from love and compassion but it’s not an easy path. Derrick’s “burning fire of faith” would call for uncompromising doctrine in all circumstances, but that still should allow for empathy, kindness, consideration – the Lord’s love and mercy. Such issues will continue to test the church – and our own responses.

The fundamentals of what the church stands for are both institutional and intensely personal, because while the church exists as a necessary organization its actual existence is within our own hearts and minds. We are called to the

challenge for our church's survival in this negative culture and it comes down to our personal response: "Here I am, Lord. Send me." This is what Derrick sees as "the call to the cost of discipleship." It is within the fabric and unity of our response that the church lives and has hope.

(BMH)

# Church News

*Compiled by Bruce Henderson*

## NEWS FROM WEST AFRICA

*The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs*

I thought it would be nice to share some of the exciting events that recently happened in West Africa on a three-week trip that my wife, Cathy, and I took in November. For a number of years now, the General Church has had New Church ministers in six West African countries: Ghana, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. On November 16, 2025, we officially added a seventh country to that list: Liberia, when the **Rev. Benedict T. Morris** was inaugurated into the priesthood and ordained in the first degree.

Benedict was a native-born Liberian, but fled with his family to neighboring Côte d'Ivoire during the country's second civil war in 2001. He learned to speak French there and eventually discovered the Heavenly Doctrine. He felt called to enter the priesthood and spent a long seven years training. When he graduated from the Ivorian Theological School his desire was to move back to Liberia and start a New Church congregation.

The ordination service was very powerful as it dawned on a number of people there that the Lord's Second Coming now has reached Liberia, possibly for the first time! It was also especially moving because at the service, Benedict connected for the first time with family he had never met before, including a brother, sisters, nephews and nieces, who were born after he fled Liberia. We are all praying that many of the friends and family who attended the ordination will find the Heavenly Doctrine to be a source of inspiration and will choose to make the New Church their new spiritual home.

From Liberia, we travelled to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire to meet with the faculties of the theological schools in each of those countries. **The Rev. Scott Frazier**, the new Dean of our Theological School in Bryn Athyn, joined us for this portion of the trip. It was Scott's first trip to West Africa and it was vital for him to gain a better understanding of how we can help coordinate and support the theological training of students in those schools. Overall, it was

very useful to have those discussions face to face, and I believe everyone came away encouraged that we can be mutually supportive of each other's efforts.

The visits to the theological schools culminated in the ordination of two other recent graduates from Ghana. The service was held at the Tema New Church and was well attended by members, friends and family. The **Rev. Benjamin Ebo Saah Hayford** and the **Rev. Sylvanus Charles Karikari** both gave heartfelt and sincere statements of faith and purpose as they professed their hopes for serving the New Church in Ghana in the years to come. (See page xxx for their Declarations of Faith.)

The following week was focused on the two elementary schools we have in Ghana located in Tema and Asakraka. Joining Cathy and me for this part of the trip was Educational Consultant, **Jane Edmunds**, who was the long-time Principal of the Kainon New Church School in Westville, South Africa. Between these two schools there are more than 600 students who appear to be polite, receptive and God-fearing by nature, so there is a huge opportunity there to instruct them in light of the Word and the Heavenly Doctrine. Unfortunately, we do not have any trained New Church teachers in those schools, so their ability to teach in light of those wonderful truths is severely curtailed.

The purpose of this visit was to investigate ways we can help them to become more capable of delivering New Church education in these schools. There are a lot of hurdles to overcome, both financial and logistical, but the teachers we worked with during the sample training seminars we provided were generally enthusiastic and wanted to learn more.

The final momentous event at the end of our three-week journey was the dedication of the newly finished church building in Ningokope. The **Rev. John Segbenu** is the pastor of this congregation located in a rural village near Abbeykope. It was amazing to watch as people came by van, by moped, and many traveled on foot for miles to attend. One thing that stood out was how many children were in this group and how much they loved to dance and sing!

After the dedication of the building was complete and a brand-new copy of the Word was placed on the altar, there was the confirmation of John's adult daughter, **Monica**, who gave a beautiful and inspiring confession of faith. Following this, Monica had her two-year-old daughter baptized and then there were about 20 more baptisms including adults, teens and children. The two-hour service closed with a brief sermon on the importance of having dedicated places of worship to the Lord Jesus Christ where people can come together in His name.

Afterwards, we went straight to the airport to return home. As the wheels of the plane lifted off the tarmac in Accra, I was struck with a profound sense of respect for the people of the Lord's vineyard in West Africa. They do so much, with so little, and through all the trials and tribulations they face, they never

seem to lose faith in the Lord. Their simple trust in the Lord's ability to take care of them and to be content in the dispensations of His Divine Providence is inspiring. So, if you ever get the chance to visit one of those countries, don't miss the opportunity. It will change your life in a positive way.

(See photos on page 49.)

## GIRLS SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

*James M. Adams, Managing Director*

I am pleased to announce that **Erica Odhner Stine** has been unanimously affirmed as the Girls School Principal by the Academy Secondary Schools Board Committee and the Academy Board of Trustees.

Erica is hard-working, creative, and has done an outstanding job as interim Girls School Principal. She has demonstrated a unique ability to navigate challenging situations and provide leadership in developing new opportunities for the Girls School.



## ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

*Highlights from the meetings of May 9-10, 2025*

### Chancellor

*Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.*

Appreciation and gratitude were expressed to **Dr. Charles Lindsay**, at the conclusion of his term as Vice Chair of the Board, and for the service of two retiring trustees, **Brent McCurdy** and **Dain Kistner**. Mr. McCurdy served as Board Vice Chair for four years and as chair of several Board committees.

The Board approved a policy on the principles of faith that are expected to guide the work of Academy personnel.

**Shaun Buss** was welcomed as the new Board Vice Chair.

### Vice Chair

The outgoing Vice Chair, Dr. Lindsay, addressed four major issues facing the

**Academy:**

1. Governance
2. Responding to a warning from the Middle States Committee on Higher Education
3. Hiring a new Secretary-General Counsel
4. Assuring financially sustainable institutions that deliver a mission-aligned product that is both needed and desired

The new Vice Chair set these objectives for the Board:

1. Continuing the evaluation and implementation of the Governance Study
2. Producing disciplined strategic plans with five-year financial models
3. Mission statement reviews

**Treasurer**

**Duane Hyatt** reported on a study of 20 years of costs of Central Shared Services to assess potential areas of savings, that substantial cost reductions have already been made and few if any areas remain where savings can be found.

**Bryn Athyn College**

President **Sean Connelly** noted that the College is in its first year of a multi-year turn-around, and that for FY25 \$500,000 was trimmed from the budget to stay within Board-mandated guardrails. For FY26 the College received \$800,000 in grants (Cole Foundation \$100,000; Glencairn Foundation \$500,000; General Church \$200,000).

The College FY26 budget, which is also within the guardrails of 5% endowment payout plus \$500,000, was approved by the Board. The budget rests on two real estate transactions that must be Board-approved, with the proceeds applied to current operations. Much work still remains to achieve financial sustainability.

Next for the College is appointing a team of faculty, administration and Board members to construct a strategic plan that needs to reflect a long-term turnaround over at least five years. After the bruising “re-sizing” efforts, there is work to be done to repair relations with the faculty.

## Academy Secondary Schools

Annual fundraising exceeded budget goals. Other gifts have revived special programs. This was another extraordinary year with very generous endowment gifts. The dormitory transition, with a modified meal program, is working. More attention and work is needed on attracting students from New Church congregations.

## Cairnwood Estate

Private rentals remain the mainstay revenue source for Cairnwood Estate. During FY25 it hosted 70 receptions, 32 photo shoots, nine corporate events and 27 Garden House rentals (138 total), and more than 12,000 visitors. Revenue will exceed budget goals for the fiscal year.

Cairnwood also hosted numerous school and community events, including the Centennial celebration of Pitcairn Airfield, attended by 375.

Cairn Club now has a liquor license to support Cairnwood and its events. This year it transferred \$40,000 in support of Cairnwood.

Various maintenance and upkeep projects were carried out, some funded by grants.

## Facilities and Grounds

New boilers are needed in 13 Academy buildings, which will be very expensive. Best methods may not be affordable. What to repair, how and when, are all under study.

## Elections

Trustee **Susan de Maine** was re-elected to the Glencairn Museum Board. **Sean Connolly, Meg Rohtla and Derek Glunz**, along with Trustee **Megan Fraser** as Board representative, were approved for three-year terms on the Cairnwood Board of Governors. Susan de Maine, **Owen Frazier, Lee Horigan and Ken Schauder** were re-elected to the Board of Trustees and **David Cooper** and **William Kunkle** are newly elected trustees.

## New Mission Statement

At its Charter Day meeting the Academy Corporation approved a single unifying Mission Statement for the entire Academy of the New Church. It reads:

*The mission of the Academy of the New Church is to promote, share and deepen understanding of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church through education, research, publication and priestly training, guided by the understanding of those Doctrines within the General Church of the New Jerusalem. The Academy seeks to engage students and the broader community of learners in this mission through Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and Theological School, Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools, Glencairn Museum, Cairnwood Estate and Swedenborg Library. By means of this mission the Academy encourages a life according to these doctrines.*

## **GLENCAIRN AWARDS FOR 2026**

The Glencairn Award Committee has begun accepting written nominations for the 2026 award.

The award is given to an outstanding teacher or a member of a New Church community for past achievements and/or contributions in the fields of religion, science, education, the arts, literature, or community service. Such achievements are the sole criteria for the award. It may not be given as compensation for service or as a supplement to salary or based on the financial needs of the recipient.

All nominations must be made on a nomination application form and submitted electronically or by mail to the Committee's Secretary, Phillip R. Zuber (see below). He is not a member of the Committee and has no input on who receives a Glencairn Award.

You may request a nomination application from the Secretary or by downloading the document with this link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/zfsflkob2ws3hmr7q61xv/GAC-Application-2026-fillablepdf?rlkey=y4w5e76ivonbvsxjmpuuewawo&st=j0li34l0&dl=0>

The nomination application form must be completed and submitted to the Committee Secretary by March 27, 2026.

All nominations and any other information provided to the Committee about the nominee will be kept in strict confidence by the Committee.

Further instructions on how to make a nomination are contained in the nomination application form.

An announcement will be made when and where the 2026 award will be announced.

Phillip R. Zuber, Esq.  
Secretary to the Glencairn Award Committee  
P.O. Box 711, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009-0731  
Phone: 301-518-7115  
Email: [phillip.zuber@anc-gc.org](mailto:phillip.zuber@anc-gc.org)

## THE NEW CHURCH IN ASIA – 2025

*The Rev. John Jin*

Our mission: To grow into an Asian New Church community that loves one another by obeying the Lord's teachings. Things we focused on for this purpose:

- Clergy's Role: Teaching the Lord's Word, leading to the Lord, and keeping order
- The Role of the Laity: Obeying, practicing and serving

### Japanese New Church

The core activities focus on three areas to build a healthy New Church:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth. Japanese people have long believed Shintoism, Buddhism and the folk belief that various gods or deities protect them from natural disasters and make their lives prosperous. This polytheistic view is an obstacle to the New Church's core belief that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the God of heaven and earth. Therefore, the Japanese New Church focuses on this theme at Sunday worship, doctrinal classes and other activities.
2. Practicing charity: Due to long periods of internal conflict and war, people have gradually lost interest in their neighbors. This is the biggest factor hindering love for one's neighbors. To overcome this almost internalized factor, we decided to diligently discuss and study how we can care for and love our neighbors under these circumstances.
3. Japanese New Church members lack respect for their clergy and a willingness to learn from one another. For this reason we are gathering people who have left the church and studying ways to resolve this issue. The pastor meets with church members, individually or in small groups, to discuss the issue and find solutions. In particular, the pastor humbly accepts areas for improvement and takes the initiative to implement them.

## Korean New Church

Overall, there are no young people and they are not interested in spiritual matters. Therefore, church members are aging and losing vitality. Also, pastors are mostly in their 60s and 70s, and there are almost no new applicants for seminaries, so the future is uncertain.

How to overcome this:

- 1. Transform into a healthy New Church:** The Korean New Church aims to become a heavenly community that loves one another through obedience to the Lord's teachings. All sermons, doctrinal classes, church outreach and other church activities will focus on this goal.
- 2. Explore effective outreach methods:** We don't know yet what will be effective outreach methods, but we decided first to find out what our strengths and weaknesses are and to use our strengths. For example: the Seoul Church has been successfully doing outreach through books, so as part of this it provided free books that help the elderly prepare for the afterlife.

As a result, there has been a lot of reading, ordering and inquiring about the summary of *Heaven and Hell*. The Korean New Church Corporation sold 185 books of the Heavenly Doctrine itself, and through this many readers found the church. The church will further strengthen outreach through publishing.

In the case of Gwangju New Church, outreach is being done primarily for people interested in spirituality. Through this, influential people came to have a positive view of the teachings of the New Church. Although this has not led to direct membership, it greatly helped to improve the image of the New Church. The church plans to activate the New Church's mission and promotion through the website and other means, online and offline.

3. To cope with the shortage of the Korean New Church Theological School, schools will focus on re-educating pastors and training lay leaders. As an example, the Theological School has started a leadership course to train those who can lead healthy churches.
- 4. Come and See Movement:** To reach out through life rather than

words we first focus on creating an atmosphere of harmony and love within the church and are carrying out various activities to achieve this.

## Chinese New Church

The membership of the Chinese New Church grew rapidly in 2024-25 through increased small, cell-group activities, and because the Heavenly Doctrine has been translated, the number of readers has increased. Now we carefully review and correct. In 2024, the church published the first volume of *Heavenly Secrets* and distributed copies to the university libraries in Mainland China, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asia countries.

Sunday worship services officially began and have continued despite external pressures. In Shanghai, every Sunday about 30-50 people participate. In Jiujiang, 15 people participate, and in Beijing and other places 10 or more participate.

Study groups include offline groups in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Zhengzhou, Yongcheng and other cities. Online groups include Beijing, Xi'an, Shandong and other cities.

**Annual Gathering:** New Church members in China held an assembly in 2023. The theme was how to establish a Healthy New Church, focusing on obeying the Word and loving each other. The 2025 annual gathering was held July 18-21 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

**Chinese government regulations** are becoming increasingly strict. They do not allow those under 18 to attend church worship and Sunday School programs or university student religious fellowships. Therefore, we develop educational centers in areas where young people can be educated freely, and adults can gather to study and discuss without regulations the *Gome Tebah* (the ark of bulrushes from *Exodus 2*) in Sabah, Malaysia, so they continue to educate themselves and train for their uses and becoming a base for missionary work in Asia – excluding Korea, China and Japan.

**The Chinese New Church** does not remain centered on the remnants of Christianity and the growth model of the past. Instead, it dreams of missions centered on Gentiles, who make up more than 80% of the population, and is researching a church model that fits this.

In this regard, the Heavenly Doctrine presents the early and ancient churches that grew with love of the neighbor as their central theme – as models. To achieve this, we are conducting research on these churches, as well as missionary work among the Gentiles, as depicted in the Heavenly Doctrine. We are also interacting with scholars who study the Chinese people's character, religious background and ancient history. We look forward to the encouragement and advice of our New Church friends.

## YOUTH WEEKEND IN TORONTO

*The Rev. Todd Beiswenger*

It wouldn't be much of a youth weekend without some youths, and from what I've been told, we had more youths than at any other youth weekend. By my count there were 58 attending from seven different congregations: Kitchener, Glenview, Pittsburgh, Kempton, Bryn Athyn, Oak Arbor and, of course, Toronto. There were no issues with border crossings, and the weather was absolutely fantastic.

For the theme I chose: *Defense Against the Dark Arts: Understanding the Nature of Evil*. The title is a bit of a play off Harry Potter, but the idea was to teach the children how evil works to seduce us. So often at these camps the focus is on "nice" things like "Charity," "Courteous Morality" and such, but we also need to know the traps that hell lays out for us. So, with that in mind, we watched the movie "Coraline" on Friday night as I think it depicts how evil works quite well.

The next morning I led a lecture and discussion on the movie, showing how it depicts many concepts and passages found in the Writings. This was followed by a session led by the **Rev. Brett Buick**, who had the teens work in groups to answer questions about hell. Then he went through the questions with them, showing them passages that provide the answers.

After that is when the fun began. We dispersed the group to three local swimming pools, not so much for the swimming, but so that they could all get showers! The lack of showers is the main disadvantage of hosting at Olivet, and this was the best way we could keep the body odor under control. From there they returned to work on a craft project, have some free time, and have a BBQ dinner before we went go karting at K1 Speed in Mississauga for a mini-Grand Prix.

We wrapped up the weekend Sunday morning with a church service on "*Dominating Your Evils*," the idea being that now that we know how evil is going to attack us, we can use that to rule over the hells.

I think we accomplished more than just running the kids through a gauntlet of activities though. They are the future of the church, and one of the things that is super useful with these events is getting the kids of the various congregations to see that there are other kids in other places that actually do hold these same values.

The organized New Church is small, so I think it really helps when they don't feel quite so weird and isolated in their beliefs. They can remember these weekends and think: "Hey, there are other people my age who believe this and are into the church, too." To my mind, that's the real win with these events.

Finally, thanks are in order. Many thanks to our Olivet team: **Erik and**

**Kim Parker, Katherine Jutras, Karen Cooper, Lee Horigan, Jan Parker and Naomi Reid.** Beyond them, we had a group of chaperones, drivers and ministers who contributed their time and energy to help the weekend go smoothly: **Rev. Brett Buick, Rev. Erik Buss, Barry Smith, Nicole Frazier, Laura Hill, Emmy Hasen, James Cole, Amaie Cole, Anna-Katrine King and Elizabeth Prendergast.** A special thanks to the General Church in Canada for helping fund this! We needed all of you to make this happen, and while it was a lot of work, it was time and effort well spent.

(See photos on page 50)

## THEISTIC SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM

A Theistic Science Group and Swedenborg Scientific Association Symposium was held at Bryn Athyn College on October 25, 2025, with the theme: *The Burning Bush – Seeing the Sacred in Science.*

Presentation in the morning session included:

- **Rev. Reuben Bell:** Opening Remarks and Remembrance of Ron Horvath
- **Rev. Andy Heilman:** The Spiritual Meaning of the Bramble Burning with Fire
- **Rev. Clark Echols:** The Sacred in the Brain
- **Dr. Stephen Smith:** A Dynamic Model of the Mind with References to Swedenborg and Pierce
- **Dr. Ian Thompson:** New and Useful Ideas in Physics and Psychology from Swedenborg

Afternoon presenters included:

- **Angela Rose:** Goethe's Swedenborgian Worldview
- **Rev. Andy Heilman:** Finding a New Physics Course in the Four Laws Revealed in Apocalypse Explained 1146
- **Rev. Reuben Bell:** Intelligent Design 2.0
- **Max Blair:** My Testimony to Theistic Science from the Classroom

## MORE PROGRESS

After a lengthy update on the work of the New Christian Bible Study Project in the November/December issue of *New Church Life* Director **Steve David** quickly added two more.

The hybrid Writings translation project has just been deployed and “we

should be able to fill language gaps a lot faster now. It changes the whole translation ‘thing’.”

The Makovikj family just finished the Montenegrin/Croatian *True Christian Bible* translation – in less than four months. “The hybrid human/machine system worked – and they worked really hard. If we can replicate something approaching this across all our other target languages it will be a big deal!”

Noted in the December fund-raising appeal were these numbers:

- The Bible is available on the website in 49 languages, the Writings in 28
- There were 5.67 million unique visitors to the website in November
- 671 creative people have provided 23,211 translations, articles and explanations
- The website is a hub/clearing house for 2,415 New Christian videos
- Latest numbers were 42,300 messages handled by the NC Chatbot
- We have a lot of productive strategic relationships with all church branches, schools, clergy and many New Christian groups and foundations

# Announcements

## BAPTISMS

*The innocence of the Lord flows into angels of the third heaven, where all are in innocence of wisdom, passes on through the lower heavens, but only through the innocent affections of angels there; and so descends directly and indirectly into little children. (Conjugal Love 396)*

### **Andersson, Alice Therese Pia**

At Stockholm, Sweden, October 26, 2025, Rev. Göran R. Appelgren officiating.

**Chapman, Stephanie Renee**  
Of Bothell, Washington, October 9, 2025, Rev. John L. Odhner officiating. (online baptism)

### **Draper, Hannah Claire**

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, August 17, 2025, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

### **Draper, Jack Chase**

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, August 17, 2025, son of Chase and Hannah Nel Draper, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

### **Hartman, Sumner Eugene**

At Maysville, Missouri, October 19, 2025, son of Alex and Hannah Klippensein Hartman, Rev. Calvin B. Heinrichs officiating.

### **Lumsden, Henry Ragnar Mark**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, October 24, 2025, son of Derrick and Eden King Lumsden, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

### **McCurdy, Hayden Kristofer**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, November 16, 2025, son of Blake and Kaitlyn Brock McCurdy, Rev. George D. McCurdy officiating.

### **Rosenberger, Lumi Iris**

At Southampton, Pennsylvania, October 26, 2025, daughter of Ryan and Brooke Blair Rosenberger, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

### **Rosenberger, Sky Florence**

At Southampton, Pennsylvania, October 26, 2025, daughter of Ryan and Brooke Blair Rosenberger, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

### **Rutks, Reinhold**

At Stockholm, Sweden, May 31, 2025, Rev. Göran R. Appelgren officiating.

### **Synnestvedt, Sarah**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, November 2, 2025, daughter of Judah and Lydia Smith Synnestvedt, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

## CONFIRMATION

*How can a man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word.  
With my whole heart I have sought you; O, let me not wander from Your  
commandments. (Psalm 119:9,10)*

### **de Chazal, Luke Adrien**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,  
October 18, 2025, Rev. Scott I.  
Frazier officiating.

## MARRIAGES

*When married partners love each other tenderly, they think of eternity in  
regard to the marriage covenant, and not at all its being terminated by death.  
(Conjugial Love 216)*

**Armitage-Lourens, Shane Sale**  
**Armitage and Angelique Lourens**  
At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South  
Africa, October 18, 2025, Rev. Joel  
C. Glenn officiating.

**Cranch-Bevilacqua, Alex Douglas**  
**Cranch and Stephanie Rose**  
**Bevilacqua**  
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,  
October 26, 2025, Rev. Charles E.  
Blair officiating.

**Pitcairn-McQueen, Derron Grant**  
**Pitcairn and Shannah Winnifred**  
**McQueen**  
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,  
November 15, 2025, Rev. Scott I.  
Frazier officiating.

**IN MEMORIAM**

*A person lives as a person after death. The Lord, who is Jehovah from eternity and the Creator of the universe, has provided that the condition of a person who conjoins himself with Him by living according to His commandments be more blessed and happy after death than his condition before in the world.*

*(Conjugal Love 28)*

**Asplundh, Gwendolyn McQueen**  
October 31, 2025, of Bryn Athyn,  
Pennsylvania. 94

**McCollum, Mary Schoenberger**  
September 10, 2025, of Bryn Athyn,  
Pennsylvania. 67

**Naill, Janyne Luise**  
July 9, 2025, of McMinnville,  
Oregon. 78

**Smith, Andrew Price**  
September 30, 2025, of Cumming,  
Georgia. 91

**Smith, Joan Unangst**  
November 2, 2025, of Cumming,  
Georgia. 88

**Rogers, Kirsten “Kit” Rydstrom**  
October 23, 2025, of Huntingdon  
Valley, Pennsylvania. 80

**Roth, Teresa Eileen Dunne**  
November 17, 2025, of Bryn Athyn,  
Pennsylvania. 93

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# New Church Life

Published bimonthly by  
**the General Church of the New Jerusalem**  
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009 U.S.A.  
[www.newchurch.org](http://www.newchurch.org) | [www.newchurchlife.org](http://www.newchurchlife.org)  
**January/February 2026**